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Spotlighting racism, stigma, UN launches International Decade of People of African Descent

10 December - People of African descent still face racism in every country, region and continent of the world, said United Nations General Assembly President Sam Kutesa as the word body today kicked off its International Decade of People of African Descent.

“Over the next ten years, people everywhere are encouraged to take part in the global conversation on the realities faced by people of African descent,” Mr. Kutesa who is a national of Uganda told the General Assembly today, calling the Decade’s launch a historic achievement.

“The Decade will allow us to explore the challenges faced by people of African descent due to pervasive racism and racial discrimination engrained in our society today,” he added.

On 23 December 2013, the General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming the International Decade for People of African Descent, commencing on 1 January 2015 and ending on 31 December 2024 with the theme “People of African descent: recognition, justice and development.”

Joining Mr. Kutesa at the Headquarters event was UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Valerie Amos, who spoke on behalf of the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonović; and Irina Bokova, Director General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Culture Organization (UNESCO). The event also featured several performances by African musicians.
This Decade is an opportunity for a wide range of actors including the United Nations, Governments, civil society and individuals to create synergy in efforts to combat racism and contribute to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) adopted at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

Mr. Kutesa added that it is important to ensure the protection of the human rights of all people African descent. Effective actions at the national and regional levels contribute toward tangible improvements in the lives of millions of people of African descent around the world.

On the matter of justice, he said that people of African descent are “too often” victims of crime and violence, while facing discrimination in their attempts to seek legal redress. In many societies the problem is endemic.

On development, he said the international community has come to recognize the correlation between poverty and racism. Despite the refutable evidence of contribution people of African descent have made to the development of our societies, they are too often marginalized.

During the decade, States are encouraged to help people of African descent by revisiting policies and practices that have a negative impact on the communities of people of African descent. African diaspora is a component of Africa, he said.

The decade is an opportunity to “unite our voices” and renew political will to eliminate racial discrimination against anyone, anywhere.

Speaking on behalf of UN Secretary-General, Ms. Amos said that people of African descent suffer from inequality and disadvantage from the history of slavery. People of African descent are among the poorest and most marginalized around the world with limited access to healthcare, education and even employment.

People of African descent face alarmingly high rates of police violence and racial profiling, Mr. Ban said, calling on Governments to do more to ensure justice. This Decade is about focused and converted action to guarantee that “a decade from now the situation of people of African descent is improved.”

Creative initiatives will be the ones to make concrete impact on people’s lives, the UN chief said, noting that some Member States have already allocated funds for their Decade activities.

Mr. Šimonović said that the launch of the decade on UN Human Rights Day is symbolic. Reading Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he said that the “simple words should guide us.”

“Human rights belongs to us all,” he declared, noting recent events in New York that serve as a tragic reminders that people of African descent face disproportionate levels of racial discrimination. But the problem is universal.

“This Decade aims to shine a light on inequality, invisibility, underdevelopment, discrimination and violence on each and every continent,” the human rights chief said.

The 10-year span will be an opportunity to call for the adoption of anti-discrimination laws and ensure justice by fighting against impunity in regard to racial profiling and guarantee the equal protection of the law. Decade activities will also promote the right to development and equal access to education, health, as well as employment.

Also joining the event via video conference UNESCO’s Irina Bokova who said the launch of a decade sends at a critical time an essential message of hope, tolerance and human rights.

“The Decade is inspired by the powerful idea that to counter discrimination, to build a more just future, we must build on the history all humanity shares,” she said.

The past features tragic chapters. The Decade is designed to counter and eliminate prejudices inherited from the past and to shed light on the struggle of people.
UN congratulates frontline workers battling Ebola in West Africa

10 December - The United Nations today congratulated the front line workers in the field battling Ebola on their well-deserved recognition as Time “Person of the Year,” while countries affected by the outbreak and their partners met to ensure cases do not cross borders and to lay the foundation for resilient health systems respectively.

A one-day regional technical meeting in Monrovia brought together the four affected countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Mali, as well as neighbouring Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, and Nigeria, with the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) to develop an integrated and joint strategy for cross-border response.

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf emphasized the need to pool shared regional resources to counter the Ebola outbreak across the whole region, and the head UNMEER, Anthony Banbury, stated the clear commitment of the United Nations to support the regional initiatives.

“The UN system looks at things within national borders. National governments of course look at things within national borders. Major donors have funding programs that look at supporting programs in a national way,” said Banbury. “So we have to really work to change the way we normally operate so that we can put in place the most effective response to combat this crisis of Ebola.”

A summit of heads of states from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and Mali is scheduled for next week to review and endorse recommendations and commitments made at today’s regional meeting.

Meanwhile, UNMEER reported today that the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has pledged to deploy 192 medical personnel from Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo to the most-affected countries in the coming six months.

Also today, UNMEER, the World Food Programme (WFP) and other UN entities tweeted their congratulations to all of the frontline Ebola Response partners on their great work and recognition as Time Magazine’s” Person of the Year.”

In Geneva, Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the UN World Health Organization, opened a two-day meeting of officials from Ebola-affected countries, donors and international agencies meet with the aim of laying the foundation for resilient health systems.

Saying that the three hardest-hit countries, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, are among the poorest in the world, Dr. Chan said “Prior to the outbreaks, these countries had only 1 to 2 doctors to treat a population of nearly 100,000 people. That number has been diminished as more than 600 health care staff have been infected.”

She also noted that by the time Ebola was identified as the causative agent, on 21 March, the virus was firmly entrenched in Guinea.

“This is what can happen in the absence of a well-functioning health system,” the WHO chief said.

According to WHO, the objectives of the meeting are to: identify the main constraints and challenges faced by countries in rebuilding and developing more resilient health systems; identify medium- to long-term solutions on how best to build and invest in systems that deliver basic essential quality health services that can also respond adequately to future emergencies and crises; agree on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholder groups on their contribution to building resilient health systems.
To date, close to 18,000 cases of Ebola have been reported with more than 6,300 deaths, according to WHO, and Sierra Leone now has the highest total number of reported cases with 7,897 cases reported to date.

**Somalia: Security Council calls for unity amid political crisis**

**10 December** - The United Nations Security Council announced today that it has taken note of a recent parliamentary vote of “no confidence” resulting in the political ouster of Somalia’s Prime Minister amid a surge of political instability and extremist violence in the East African country.

The Somali Parliament dismissed Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed on 6 December due to reported disputes between Mr. Ahmed and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud over political appointments.

In its press statement, released early this evening, the 15-member Council underlined the “vital importance” of a united political leadership in the war-torn country and expressed concern over the impact that the latest developments may have on peace and stability. In addition, it voiced concern that further political instability could “jeopardize progress made so far towards peace and security.”

Somalia has been plagued by political infighting and outbursts of extremist violence as the terrorist group, Al-Shabaab, continues to wage a simmering insurgency. Most recently, in the city of Baidoa, a terrorist attack left at least fifteen people dead with many more wounded.

Despite the no confidence vote, the Security Council said it welcomed the resolution of the current political crisis through “the proper Parliamentary channels” and commended the Prime Minister for his acceptance of the result. Moreover, Council members underlined their “resolute support for the peace and reconciliation process” in the country and called on the new political leadership to focus on priority areas, including resuming the implementation and review of the Provisional Constitution and the passage of key legislation to establish electoral institutions.

“The Security Council reiterated their support for fast implementation of ‘Vision 2016.’ In that context they underlined the importance of the President swiftly appointing a new Prime Minister and the subsequent rapid establishment of an inclusive and representative government,” the statement continued, adding that the members stressed that “swift and sustained” restoration of political stability remained “vital” at a time when operations against Al-Shabaab continue.

**Central African Republic: UN mission captures rebel leader**

**10 December** - The Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) has announced today the arrest of Chadian rebel leader and former CAR official, Mahamat Abdul Kadre.

Mr. Abdul Kadre, also known as “Baba Ladde” was detained by MINUSCA forces on Monday in the latest of a series of actions that the Mission is undertaking as part of its Urgent Temporary Measures mandate to perform basic police functions in support of CAR authorities' fight against impunity.

He had been on the CAR authorities' arrest list since May this year and his capture is the latest in a series of major arrests including anti-Balaka leaders known as “Chocolat” and John “Americain.” The latter’s arrest was followed by the surrender of 88 of his fighters.

MINUSCA began operations in September 2014, with a mandate focused on the protection of civilians and the facilitation of a political process, including implementation of provisions of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, and setting up a mechanism to investigate violations.
Marking international observance, UN declares ‘Every day is Human Rights Day’

10 December - The universal reach of human rights should not be restricted to one day alone but extended to every day of the year, top United Nations officials declared today as they marked Human Rights Day – an annual UN-backed event commemorating the date on which the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Spearheaded by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), this year's observance – celebrated under the banner of Human Rights 365 – encompasses the idea that “every day is Human Rights Day” and that “each one of us, everywhere, at all times is entitled to the full range of human rights.”

“On Human Rights Day we speak out,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon proclaimed in his message. “We declare that human rights are for all of us, all the time: whoever we are and wherever we are from; no matter our class, our opinions, our sexual orientation.”

“Violations of human rights are more than personal tragedies,” Mr. Ban continued. “They are alarm bells that may warn of a much bigger crisis.

The Secretary-General explained that as a result of those “alarms,” his Human Rights Up Front campaign – launched in 2013 – sought to anticipate violations before they degenerate into mass atrocities or war crimes while advancing the struggle against injustice, intolerance and extremism.

The initiative includes training UN staff on the world body's core purpose of promoting respect for human rights; providing Member States with the information needed to respond to human rights violations; and ensuring that UN personnel around the world are more attuned to situations where there is a risk of serious human rights abuses and are equipped for the responsibilities that such potential crises entail.

The strategy also includes achieving more Organizational coherence by strengthening engagement with the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council and providing earlier and more streamlined support to teams on the ground before a crisis emerges; and better organization of human rights staff so that they can identify risks of serious violations of human rights that could lead to atrocities.

Finally, underpinning all these activities will be better information management on threats and risks to populations for planning operational activities and for sharing with Member States.

In his statement issued for the Day, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, echoed Mr. Ban's appeal and underscored the power of the Universal Declaration to “change the world.”

“Human rights are not country-specific. They are not a reward for good behaviour or particular to a certain era or social group. They are the inalienable entitlements of all people, at all times and everywhere, 365 days a year,” affirmed Mr. Zeid.

As part of its celebration of the Day, the OHCHR has launched a social media campaign encouraging the public to explain on a six-second Vine post why year-round human rights matter. The Vine videos will then be collected and published together on OHCHR’s Storify account.

“The UN Human Rights Office stands with the millions of people around the world whose voices are denied,” Mr. Zeid continued, as he called on the public to join OHCHR “via social media or in person.”

“Together, we must demand what should be guaranteed: our human rights, universal, indivisible, inalienable, for everyone,
365 days a year.”

‘Only by acting together’ will world transform climate challenge into opportunity – Ban

10 December - Only by acting together will world leaders transform the climate challenge into an opportunity to fundamentally rethink how we grow our economies and create a safer, healthier, more liveable world, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.

“I look around and can clearly see efforts to create this alliance taking shape,” said Mr. Ban in his remarks to the Heads of State segment at the UN Climate Change Conference in Lima, Peru, known also as the 20th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 20).

“That circle of action must continue to grow. Governments as well as business, finance, civil society, academia and all sectors must join forces,” he added.

COP 20, which opened on 1 December, brings together the 196 Parties to the UNFCCC, which is the parent treaty of the landmark 1997 Kyoto Protocol, in an attempt to hammer out the new universal treaty, which would enter force by 2020. The Conference wraps up this Friday.

Last week, Mr. Ban presented to the General Assembly his report on the post-2015 agenda entitled “The Road to Dignity by 2030,” which today he said has been received with positive feedback from Member States.

“We can end poverty. Transform our economies. And protect both people and the planet. Poverty eradication and environmental sustainability go hand in hand,” the UN chief said.

But we cannot eliminate poverty and build sustainable economies without strengthening climate resilience and utilizing cleaner, safer sources of energy, he added. We cannot fully meet the climate challenge without enhancing prosperity, equity and environmental protection for all.

With the Lima Conference ending on Friday, Mr. Ban called for a draft negotiating text that can serve as the foundation for a meaningful, universal climate agreement next year in Paris.

This agreement needs to contribute to placing the world on a pathway that keeps average global temperature rise below 2°C above the pre-Industrial stage – the safety threshold scientists say could prevent climate change from “spinning out of control.”

The Secretary-General said he was encouraged that yesterday the Green Climate Fund crossed the $10 billion initial capitalization goal and that the additional pledges from developing countries today have sent a “powerful signal to the world.”

“Let’s make Lima, COP 20, a place we write our history and we reaffirm our commitment to make this world better world for all,” he added.
UN report on ‘interpersonal violence’ shows urgent need to scale up prevention

10 December - One in four children has been physically abused, one in five girls has been sexually abused and one in three women has been a victim of physical violence at some point in her lifetime, according to the first report of its kind on violence prevent by three United Nations agencies released today.

Jointly published today by the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), The Global Status Report on Violence Prevention 2014 is the first survey of its kind to assess national efforts to address interpersonal violence, namely child maltreatment, youth violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and elder abuse at home, school and communities.

The report, containing data from 133 countries, covering 6.1 billion people and representing 88 per cent of the world’s population contains individual country profiles that reflect the extent to which key violence prevention programmes and laws and selected services for victims of violence are being implemented. It is intended for use by governments to help identify gaps and encourage and guide actions.

For example, only one third of the countries surveyed are implementing large-scale initiatives to prevent violence, such as bullying prevention programmes, visits by nurses to families at risk, and support to those who care for older people,” according to the report.

The report showed that “only half of all countries have services in place to protect and support victims of violence.”

According to the report, 475,000 people were murdered in 2012, and homicide is the third leading cause of death globally for males aged 15-44 years, “highlighting the urgent need for more decisive action to prevent violence.”

“Non-fatal acts of violence take a particular toll on women and children,” the report showed. “One in four children has been physically abused; one in five girls has been sexually abused; and one in three women has been a victim of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at some point in her lifetime.”

WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan said the consequences of violence on families and communities are profound, and can result in lifelong ill health for those affected.

“Yet we know what works to prevent violence in our homes, schools and workplaces and on our streets and playgrounds,” Dr. Chan added. “We should take inspiration from governments which have demonstrated success in reducing violence by taking the steps needed. They have shown us that indeed violence is preventable.”

Despite indications that homicide rates decreased by 16 per cent globally between 2000 and 2012, violence remains widespread.

The report assessed the scale of implementation of violence prevention programmes. It shows, for example, that:

- one half of countries are implementing school-based programmes to teach children and adolescents “life-skills” such as non-violent conflict resolution;
- one half of countries are promoting efforts to change gender norms supportive of violence against women;
- one third of countries are putting in place programmes to improve parenting in families at risk of violence
- less than one quarter of countries are developing public information campaigns to prevent elder abuse.
UNDP Administrator Helen Clark noted that “this report takes stock of the measures countries are taking to prevent and respond to interpersonal violence, but the report also reveals gaps in global violence prevention which must be filled, such as the quality and reach of prevention programmes, the access to services for victims, particularly for women and girls who are disproportionately affected by violence, and the enforcement of existing laws.”

The report also reviewed 12 laws which are relevant for violence prevention. It shows, for example, that:

- 98 per cent of countries have laws against rape;
- 87 per cent of countries have laws against domestic violence;
- 84 per cent of countries have laws against carrying weapons in schools;
- 40 per cent of countries have laws against abuse in institutions for older people.

UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov said: “Laws protecting citizens against violent crime send a clear message to society about what is acceptable.”

“With this ‘Global status report on violence prevention 2014’, we have a useful tool for identifying the gaps in legislation and enforcement in countries, which can help to indicate what further action is needed to ensure reductions in violent crime,” he said.

The report drew attention to the need for care and support to victims of violence for reducing psychological trauma, helping victims heal, and preventing further involvement in violence.

“Despite strong evidence linking experiences of violence to mental health problems, under half of countries have mental health services to address victim needs, with only 15 per cent of countries in Africa offering such services,” according to the report.

**Ban welcomes Lesotho elections, reaffirms commitment to peace in the Kingdom**

10 December - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has noted the recent announcement of national elections in Lesotho to be held on 28 February next year.

“The Secretary-General welcomes the progress achieved so far in the efforts to uphold democratic principles and secure the restoration of political stability and security in the Kingdom,” he said in a statement issued yesterday evening by his spokesman.

“He encourages all Basotho leaders to comply with the Maseru Facilitation Declaration and work together in a spirit of compromise to ensure an environment conducive to peaceful and credible elections.”

Commending the leadership shown by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in facilitating an agreed way forward and a return to political normalcy, he reaffirmed the continued commitment of the United Nations to support the efforts of the Government and the people of Lesotho to consolidate peace in the Kingdom.
Security Council condemns actions of LRA in Central Africa, demands end to all attacks

10 December - The Security Council today expressed its concern at the grave security situation in parts of Central Africa, particularly the ongoing crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) and its regional impact, the continuing threat of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), and the expansion of Boko Haram terrorist activities into countries in the sub-region.

“The Security Council reiterates its strong condemnation of the appalling attacks, war crimes and crimes against humanity carried out by the LRA,” the Statement said, also citing the group’s “violations of international humanitarian law and abuses of human rights, including the LRA’s recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, killing and maiming, rape, sexual slavery and other sexual violence, and abductions.”

Demanding an immediate end to all attacks by the LRA, the Council urged the group to release all those abducted, and to disarm and demobilize. It welcomed progress made with regard to ending LRA war crimes and crimes against humanity in Central Africa, and reiterated its resolve to maintain the current momentum until the threat posed by the LRA was permanently ended.

Noting that much of this violence was taking place within the remit of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), the Council encouraged the Office to continue supporting States with elections, including through the promotion of women’s political participation.

UNOCA was also urged to, in its coordination role, as well as the UN’s missions and other presences in the region to enhance efforts in support of implementation of the UN Regional Strategy to Address the Threat and Impact of the Activities of the LRA. It encouraged the Secretary-General to optimize UNOCA’s efforts, including through provision of staff and support to counter-LRA efforts.

The Council reiterated its strong support for the African Union Regional Cooperation Initiative Against the LRA and encouraged LRA affected and neighbouring States to cooperate with the African Union-Regional Task Force, which it commended for “significant progress.”

It also underlined the need for all military action against the LRA to be conducted in compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, as applicable, and to minimise the risk of harm to civilians.

Council members also expressed deep concern at the terrorist attacks conducted by Boko Haram since 2008, which have caused large-scale and devastating loss of life and represent a threat to the stability and peace of West and Central Africa, and were concerned that Boko Haram’s activities continued to have an adverse humanitarian impact in the region.
On Human Rights Day, UN official calls for Member States to ‘stamp out torture’

10 December - Governments must ramp up their efforts in eradicating the practice of torture and compensate the victims of this “most vicious of crimes,” the top United Nations human rights official has urged, as he marked the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention against Torture.

In a press statement issued today following the release of two “ground-breaking” reports – one from the United States and another from Brazil – on the use of torture by both Governments, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, called on all Member States “to act unequivocally” in stamping out the practice.

“Today is not only Human Rights Day,” Mr. Zeid said, as he recalled the UN-backed observance commemorating the date on which the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “it is also the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention against Torture on 10 December 1984.”

“Yet, as yesterday’s US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report shows, torture is still taking place in quite a few of the 156 countries that have ratified the Convention against Torture and have domestic legislation making it illegal.”

The UN rights chief welcomed publication of both the US Senate Select Committee’s summary report on the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) Detention and Interrogation Program, as well as the report of Brazil’s National Truth Commission, which documents extensive use of torture among other gross and systematic human rights violations committed over a 42-year period, including the 1964-85 military dictatorship.

He noted, however, that the release of both reports, and the US one in particular, provided “a very stark reminder” that not only was the practice of torture still current, much more needed to be done to abolish it completely.

“Few countries will admit that their state apparatus has been practising torture, and many continue shamelessly to deny it – even when it is well documented by international human rights Treaty Bodies, and the scars are all too visible on the victims who manage to escape,” stated Mr. Zeid, who commended the Governments of Brazil and the United States for enabling the reports’ release.

He admitted that while it would take time to fully analyse the contents of the “landmark” reports, the human rights community could “still draw some stark conclusions about the failures to eradicate this serious international crime, for which there should be no statute of limitations and no impunity.”

In light of the report’s revelations, Mr. Zeid also wondered how both States would fulfil their obligation to ensure accountability for the crimes that have been committed, adding that those who ordered, enabled or committed torture “cannot simply be granted impunity because of political expediency.”

International law prohibits the granting of immunities to public officials who have engaged in acts of torture. This applies not only to the actual perpetrators but also to those senior officials within the US Government who devised, planned and authorised these crimes.

The US is legally obliged, by international law, to bring those responsible to justice. The UN Convention Against Torture and the UN Convention on Enforced Disappearances require States to prosecute acts of torture and enforced disappearance where there is sufficient evidence to provide a reasonable prospect of conviction.
“We have time to consider this aspect as we fully digest the implications of these two ground-breaking reports,” he continued.

“At the same time we must recognize the need for immediate bold action to eradicate this most vicious of crimes. And victims of torture, disappearance, extrajudicial executions, or arbitrary or unlawful detention must be speedily and adequately compensated for the terrible experiences they have suffered at the hands of employees of the State.”

**Tens of millions of elderly are abused each month – UN health agency reports**

**10 December** - Millions of elderly people report significant abuse each month, “an important public health problem” expected to increase in many countries as the number of people aged 60 and older is forecasted to reach about 1.2 billion by the year 2025, the World Health Organization reported today.

“Abusive acts in institutions include physically restraining patients, depriving them of dignity (by for instance leaving them in soiled clothes) and choice over daily affairs, intentionally providing insufficient care (such as allowing them to develop pressure sores), over- and under-medicating and withholding medication from patients; and emotional neglect and abuse,” WHO said in a fact sheet released today.

“While there is little information regarding the extent of abuse in elderly populations, especially in developing countries, it is estimated that 4-6 per cent of elderly people report significant abuse in the last month,” according to the UN health agency.

That figure translates into the tens of millions and is predicted to increase as many countries experience rapidly ageing populations. The number of people worldwide aged 60 years and older will more than double, from 542 million in 1995 to about 1.2 billion in 2025.

“Older people are often afraid to report cases of abuse to family, friends, or to the authorities,” according to WHO.

WHO also noted that data on the extent of the problem in institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes and other long-term care facilities are scarce.

“A survey of nursing-home staff in the United States of America, however, suggests rates may be high: 36 per cent witnessed at least one incident of physical abuse of an elderly patient in the previous year; 10 per cent committed at least one act of physical abuse towards an elderly patient,” WHO said. In addition, 40 per cent admitted to psychologically abusing patients, the same survey showed.

And The Global Status Report on Violence Prevention 2014, the first survey of its kind, which was released today and assessed national efforts to address interpersonal violence including elder abuse, noted that less than half of the 133 surveyed countries reported plans to address elder abuse (41 per cent).

WHO defined elder abuse as “a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person.”

And “the consequences of abuse can be especially serious because their bones are more brittle and convalescence is longer.”

“While older men have the same risk of abuse as women, in some cultures where women have inferior social status, elderly women are at higher risk of neglect through abandonment when they are widowed and their property is seized,” according to the fact sheet. “Women may also be at higher risk of more persistent and severe forms of abuse and injury.”

WHO drew attention to the fact that “too little is known about elder abuse and how to prevent it, particularly in developing countries. The scope and nature of the problem is only beginning to be delineated, many risk factors remain contested, and
At Lima climate talks, UN launches new coalition to promote renewable energy

10 December - The launch of a new coalition spearheaded by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and focused on boosting renewable energy usage around the world was announced today as Member States head into the final three-day stretch of a major UN climate conference in Lima, Peru aimed at tackling the imminent threat of climate change.

Assembled amid an increase in global renewable energy initiatives and energy efficiency projects around the world, the 1 Gigaton Coalition was formed in response to a dearth in measurements and reporting on greenhouse gas emissions reductions which, UNEP explained, would help encourage the uptake of energy efficiency policies and renewable energy technologies.

In fact, according to the UN agency’s estimates, measurements of greenhouse gas emissions reductions would amount to about one gigaton a year by 2020, fully indicating the savings countries could make from the extensive usage of renewable energy.

“Our global economy could be $18 trillion better off by 2035 if we adopted energy efficiency as a first choice, while various estimates put the potential from energy efficient improvements anywhere between 2.5 and 6.8 gigatons of carbon per year by 2030,” UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner stated in a press release.

“To build the momentum and support required to achieve such savings, the climate and economic benefits of existing energy efficiency and renewable energy projects should be more widely recognized, instead of passing under the radar as they often do now,” he said.

UNEP spotlighted what it said was “significant evidence” of the financial rewards tied to energy efficiency. For instance, a global shift to energy-efficient appliances and equipment – from lighting and air conditioners to refrigerators and electric motors – would reduce overall electricity consumption by over 10 per cent saving $350 billion annually in bills and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 1.25 billion tonnes per year.

In addition, the agency said, new technologies spawned by the renewable energy sector also open up market opportunities and create new jobs. Between 2005 and 2014, employment in the renewables sector doubled from three million jobs to 6.5 million, according to estimates, providing greater incentives for Member States to confront the pressing challenge of climate change.

“Current and planned energy efficiency policies harness merely a third of the economically viable energy efficiency potential,” Mr. Steiner continued. “The 1 Gigaton Coalition will play a crucial role in making these contributions visible by measuring emissions reductions and reporting successes, thus building the case for scaling up of energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.”
Ban ‘deeply saddened’ by death of Ziad Abu Ein, urges Israel to investigate

10 December - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today that he is “deeply saddened” by the death of Palestinian Minister Ziad Abu Ein, which occurred after a demonstration near Ramallah that resulted in clashes with Israeli security forces.

“The Secretary-General urges the Israeli authorities to conduct a prompt, thorough and transparent investigation into the circumstance of his death and appeals for calm,” Mr. Ban said in a statement by his spokesperson.

“He expresses his condolences to Minister Abu Ein’s family, the Palestinian people and its leadership.”

Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, also commented on Mr. Abu Ein’s death.

‘Things are about to change,’ UN expert urges Malta to prepare for migrants

10 December - Malta, a key entry point into Europe, needs to step up its preparation for migrants and asylum-seekers crossing the Mediterranean Sea and arriving at its external borders, United Nations human rights expert François Crépeau warned today.

He also urged European countries to support Malta’s efforts and “shoulder their share of responsibilities.” This call comes on today’s International Human Rights Day, an occasion to “remember that human rights do not only belong to Europeans,” Mr. Crépeau added.

“Malta is likely to see an increase in the number of arrivals in 2015 with the phasing out of the Italian rescue programme Mare Nostrum,” the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants said at the end of his visit to the island to assess how it manages its borders.

During his five days in Malta, the Special Rapporteur met with a range of Government officials, international organisations, civil society organisations and migrants themselves.

“Over the last year, as a result of Mare Nostrum, the number of migrants arriving in Malta has fallen significantly because, once rescued at sea, they have been disembarked in Italy,” Mr. Crépeau said. “However, things are about to change and Malta must prepare for the numbers of migrants that will arrive.”

“Consequently, the reception of such migrants and asylum seekers should not always be conducted in an ad hoc manner,” he advised.

Programmes must be developed to welcome and process adequately high numbers of migrants with a long term vision to deal with providing immediate assistance, offering legal safeguards and integration programmes for migrants and asylum-seekers that arrive irregularly.

The Special Rapporteur also called on Europe to actively support the initiatives developed by the Maltese Government and shoulder its share of responsibilities which include opening legal and safe channels for migration and mobility within the European Union.

“Migration cannot simply be seen as a border security operation,” he said. “Over-reliance on border security – which
focuses on policing, defence and criminality, instead of a rights-based approach – only serves to give a false sense of control over one’s borders.”

The expert also called on Malta to stop the policy of mandatory detention of all migrants and asylum-seekers that arrive at its borders. “Mandatory detention serves to inspire fear and distrust in the relationship between migrants, asylum-seekers and the Maltese population,” he said “This climate of fear goes on to define the policies and programmes of the Maltese authorities.”

And under no circumstances should children be held in detention: “Detaining children can never ever be in the best interests of a child and children and families with children should be hosted in open facilities with appropriate services,” he said.

Detention should always be a measure of last resort. Malta must develop non-custodial alternatives to detention for most migrants.

Additionally, upon arrival, vulnerable people – such as women, unaccompanied children and families –must be offered appropriate services to their particular vulnerabilities.

“Couples with children or female-headed households should not be housed in the immediate proximity of single men. It is important that, once vulnerabilities are identified, the right protections are then provided,” Mr. Crépeau said.

Several recent declarations show a political openness and will to ensure human rights for all in Malta and should be translated into concrete legislation and programs, he added.

A country mission report and a thematic report on EU border management will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2015.

Mr. Crépeau was appointed Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants in 2011 by the UN Human Rights Council. As Special Rapporteur, he is independent from any government or organization and serves in his individual capacity.

As number of seafaring migrants surges, UN calls for better global protection efforts

10 December - Amid record high numbers of global migrant arrivals by sea, the international community is steadily losing focus on saving lives and intensifying its efforts to deny foreigners access to asylum, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) has warned ahead of a Geneva-based forum devoted to protecting sea-bond migrants.

“This is a mistake, and precisely the wrong reaction for an era in which record numbers of people are fleeing wars,” António Guterres, the UN’s High Commissioner for Refugees, said today in a press release. “Security and immigration management are concerns for any country, but policies must be designed in a way that human lives do not end up becoming collateral damage.”

According to estimates from coastal authorities and data points collected by the UN, at least 348,000 people have risked seafaring journeys worldwide since the beginning of 2014 as they flee conflicts and poverty. Europe, facing conflicts to its south in Libya, east in Ukraine, and southeast in Syria and Iraq, is currently seeing the largest number of sea arrivals with 207,000 people crossing the Mediterranean to reach its shores – almost three times the previous known high of about 70,000, registered in 2011.

However, the UN agency noted, there are at least three other major sea routes in use today both by migrants seeking better economic opportunities and asylum seekers escaping conflict. In the Horn of Africa, some 82,000 people crossed the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea between 1 January and the end of November, leaving Ethiopia and Somalia for countries in the Arabian Peninsula. In Southeast Asia, meanwhile, an estimated 54,000 people have undertaken sea crossings, departing Bangladesh or Myanmar and heading to Thailand, Malaysia, or Indonesia. And, in the Caribbean, 2014 has seen almost 5,000 people
take to boats as they escape the clutches of poverty and explore asylum options in the neighbouring countries.

In addition to the difficulties of these journeys which often stretch across multiple borders and over thousands of kilometres, many of those migrating along these maritime corridors succumb to trafficking and smuggling networks coordinated by international organized crime. As the flow of migrants continues to swell, the UN said, many governments were finding themselves “unable to either stem the flow or stop people dying along the journey.”

“You can’t stop a person who is fleeing for their life by deterrence, without escalating the dangers even more,” Mr. Guterres continued. “The real causes have to be addressed, and this means looking at why people are fleeing, what prevents them from seeking asylum by safer means, and what can be done to crack down on the criminal networks who prosper from this, while at the same time protecting their victims.”

“It also means having proper systems to deal with arrivals and distinguish real refugees from those who are not,” he said.

Mr. Guterres’ words come as UN officials from its humanitarian and human rights agencies prepare to gather at UNHCR’s 2014 High Commissioner’s Dialogue in Geneva – an informal policy discussion forum whose focus this year is “Protection at Sea.”

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, who was also in attendance at the UNHCR event, similarly cautioned that as wealthy nations continue to guard themselves from migrant arrivals and asylum seekers, they also risk transforming into xenophobic “gated communities.”

“Unilateral attempts to close borders are almost certainly futile, and the response cannot just lie in aggressive, and often counterproductive, anti-smuggling plans,” affirmed Mr. Zeid in a press release.

“When migrants are left to drift for weeks without access to food and water; when ships deliberately refuse to rescue migrants in distress; when children in search of family reunification are detained indefinitely, denied education and care, or returned to perilous situations – these are grave human rights violations.”

The UN rights chief pointed out that policies that seek to “stamp out migration” do not decrease the numbers of would-be migrants but, instead, “exacerbate the dangers they endure” creating zones of lawlessness and impunity. As a result, he continued, nations were encouraged to establish accessible corridors for legal migration and discourage the current “siege mentality” fanned by a growing number of populist politicians and leaders.

“Ultimately, unless they can access safe and regular migration channels, desperate people may continue to brave the perils of the sea in search of protection, opportunity and hope. In their place, we would probably do the same. And perhaps only this recognition of our common humanity can guide us to make the right choices in response,” he concluded.

**UN reports potential for gradual return to global growth, foresees risks, uncertainties**

10 December - Global economic growth is forecast to continue increasing over the next two years, the United Nations reported today, despite legacies from the financial crisis continuing to weigh on growth, and the emergence of new challenges, including geopolitical conflicts such as in Ukraine, and the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

The UN World Economic Situation and Prospects 2015 (WESP) report, which was launched today, estimates growth in 2015 of 3.1 per cent and in 2016 of 3.3 per cent. Those figures are higher than the 2.6 per cent growth recorded this year, where the pace of expansion has been moderate and uneven.

“While some economic indicators are positive and moving in the right direction which points to the potential for a gradual return to consistent economic growth,” said Pingfan Hong, Director of the Development and Policy Analysis Division for the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “many risks and uncertainties could
dash efforts to get the global economy on track and moving forward.”

Over the course of 2014, unemployment remained historically high in some regions, though appeared to have stopped rising, while inflation varied, despite being broadly subdued. Trade growth was expected to pick up, while fiscal tightening was expected to continue at a slower pace in most developed economies.

Foreign direct investment inflows remained the most stable and relevant source of financing for developing countries, while capital flows were sensitive to changes in risk appetite. The dollar was expected to remain strong.

To reduce risks and meet challenges, the report says, it is imperative to strengthen international policy coordination. In particular, macroeconomic policies worldwide should be aligned toward supporting robust and balanced growth, creating productive jobs, and maintaining long-term economic and financial stability.

Analyzing countries and regions around the world, the report said that the United States fared well among developed economies, maintaining growth above 2 per cent in 2014, and expecting to continue growth in 2015 (2.8 per cent) and 2016 (3.1 per cent). The forthcoming further normalization of the US Federal Reserve’s monetary policy posed significant risks and uncertainties for the global economic outlook, depending on the timing and strategy of the monetary tightening, as well as the response by financial markets.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Western Europe failed to regain its pre-recession peak and Japan’s economy was expected to slow down on the back of reduced private consumption. The recovery in the Euro area was precarious, with the report citing great risks remaining. Underlying growth momentum was so slow that an exogenous event could return the region to recession.

The report saw divergent growth rates in developing countries and economies in transition during 2014, and projected continued growth momentum in Africa, with GDP growth there expected to accelerate to 4.6 per cent in 2015 and 4.9 per cent in 2016. East Asia was expected to grow fastest at around 6 per cent in both upcoming years, with South Asia set to see a gradual pick-up in economic growth.

Many developing countries and economies in transition faced vulnerabilities due to tightening global financial conditions, aggravated geopolitical tensions and the Ebola epidemic. Large current-account deficits and rapid credit growth in some large emerging economies were causes for concern, particularly if tested by a sudden change in market sentiment, similar to mid-2013 and early 2014. A broad-based downturn in emerging economies, particularly a sharp slowdown in China, would weigh on economic performance worldwide.

Oil price volatility also posed risks to exporters and importers, while geopolitical crises like Ukraine, Iraq, Libya and Syria hampered economic development and remained causes of uncertainty.