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Greater resources needed for Iraqis as harsh winter approaches, warn UN, regional officials

27 October - Senior officials from the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) warned today that an "immense" humanitarian crisis is unfolding in Iraq and called for greater resources from the international community to help with the upcoming winter season, as they concluded a four-day mission to conflict-riven areas in the country.

"We were able to see for ourselves the magnitude of the crisis," said Rashid Khalikov, Director in Geneva of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in a press briefing at the end of a 20 to 23 October mission to Iraq. "An immense humanitarian emergency is unfolding in front of our eyes," he added.

As part of the mission, Mr. Khalikov, along with Hesham Youssef, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for the OIC, visited Erbil, Baghdad and Dohuk Governorate in Iraq, and met with civilians, authorities and humanitarian partners.

Among the areas visited was the Kurdistan region, which bears the brunt of the displacement crisis, with more than 850,000 displaced people. The officials also went to Dohuk Governorate, where more than half a million people have sought refuge and 90,000 live in the open.

Winterisation and shelter are among the top priorities, the officials stressed, along with more resources to ensure a wider coverage for the 800,000 people who are in urgent need of shelter. Current winterisation activities include distribution of core relief items, blankets, kerosene, heating stoves, jerry cans, mats, and insulation to make tents warmer and more resistant to the winter.



With rainy season started, and winter on doorstep, UNHCR, together with partners, and support from Kuwait, hurries finishing construction of Khanke camp for displaced people from Sinjar area. Photo: UNHCR Iraq

Since January, some 1.8 million people – half of them children – have been displaced in Iraq, and hundreds of thousands more have been forced to find shelter in unfinished buildings, public spaces and informal settlements, Mr. Khalikov said. In total, there are 5.2 million Iraqis in need of assistance.

As a result of the difficulties in finding shelter, Mr. Youssef noted, there are 400 schools in Kurdistan that are hosting internally displaced people, which has led to the postponement of the school year to 1 December for those schools.

Further, he said that the two officials had visited the Turkish-Iraqi border “where refugees were coming from [Kobane] on a daily basis – around 12,000 refugees so far in the last two weeks or so.”

“We hope that more can be done in the near future,” said Mr. Youssef. “Unfortunately, the sentiment in Iraq is that this crisis will not end in the near future.”

In recent months, Iraq has been increasingly riven by conflict, terrorism and a swelling refugee crisis contributing to the Middle Eastern country’s deteriorating humanitarian situation.

The joint mission comes on the heels of the Strategic Response Plan, which was launched this past week and requests \$2.2 billion to cover the humanitarian and protection needs of displaced Iraqis by the end of December 2015.

DR Congo: amid fresh violence, ‘presence without action, undermines our credibility’ – UN envoy

27 October - Amid continuing flare-ups of deadly violence and a tenuous humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the head of the United Nations peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) in the vast African nation today underlined the need for a “proactive, not reactive” response in countering the country’s rebel groups and boosting protection for civilians.

In his briefing to the Security Council, Special Representative Martin Kobler noted that despite initial hopes that “the seeds of peace” would spread throughout the DRC’s Eastern regions, recent outbursts of violence in villages in and around the city of Beni had reminded the world “just how fragile those hopes can be.”

Mr. Kobler was referring to a series of massacres committed by the Ugandan-based Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels between 2 October and 17 October during which they “brutally massacred” over 80 civilians, mostly women and children, with machetes.

The Special Representative cautioned that although the ADF had been weakened over the past few months as the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) captured strongholds and released hostages held by the rebels, they nonetheless continued to resist the Government forces.

“These lamentable attacks, however, demonstrate the group’s resilience and their capacity to use asymmetric guerrilla and terrorist tactics against civilians,” Mr. Kobler explained.

“Under pressure and on the run, they may be trying to draw FARDC attention away by attacking population centres,” he added.

Indicating a two-point plan to combat the ADF resurgence, Mr Kobler told the 15-member Council that “only action against the ADF, not words” would serve to revive the population’s confidence in the Government forces and in the UN presence in the country as “no victory is possible without the support of the local population.”

Secondly, he said, he “strongly advocated” for decisive joint military and combat operations between the FARDC and MONUSCO in order “to bring an end to this scourge.”



Special Representative and Head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), Martin Kobler, briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Mr. Kobler acknowledged that some of his mission's focus on the ADF may have been diverted as MONUSCO continues to labour towards the neutralization of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) armed group – among the mission's long-stated "top priorities."

Leaders and members of the FDLR are among the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, during which Hutu and others who opposed the genocide were also killed, the Council recalled in a recent statement. Indeed, the FDLR is a group under UN sanctions and which has continued to promote and commit ethnically based and other killings in Rwanda and in the DRC.

He recalled that the FDLR had until 2 January, 2015 to voluntarily disarm, after which military action against the group would be "inevitable." He warned, however, that "taking this fight to the jungle will be long and difficult" and would result in "many casualties" but that there would be "no excuse for further delay" for the disarmament. "The credibility of the UN, the Congolese Government and the region are at stake."

Turning to the humanitarian situation in the country, Mr. Kobler said that the province of Katanga had been plunged into a humanitarian crisis as internally displaced persons had increased more than 11-fold over the past three years. He warned that as the country was soon expected to head to the polls, the elections themselves could be "a flashpoint," further exacerbating humanitarian conditions.

"Never-before-held local polls may add fuel to the fire of traditional rivalries and conflicts over land and customary power," he explained, adding that at the national level "some may be tempted to subvert democratic competition."

At the same time, the human rights situation in the country remained of primary concern to MONUSCO, Mr. Kobler continued, noting that his office's work advocating for and protecting the rights of the Congolese people was not undertaken to weaken or blame the Government but to "strengthen good governance," promote "long-term stability," strengthen the Government's moral authority, and open-up dialogue so that "all pending human rights questions can be discussed and confidence can be built."

On that note, the Special Representative observed that the protection of civilians and their human rights must also be enforced by MONUSCO's military component.

"The Force Commander and I agree that the Protection of Civilians is more than a mandated task," Mr. Kobler told the Council. "It is our *raison d'être* in the DRC and a moral imperative of the UN."

He affirmed that the UN's presence in critical areas of danger was "not enough" and that "presence without action, in the face of violence, undermines our credibility." To that point, he called on MONUSCO troops to engage with civilians, "pursue the danger where it lies," and "march for days into the jungle," if necessary, in order to guarantee the protection of civilians.

"Action, not inaction; proactive, not reactive; mobile forces, not static battalions; feet, not wheels," Mr. Kobler stated. "When civilians are at risk, 'Act, don't ask!'"

UN Envoy leads call for action, resources to ensure meaningful role for youths in policy talks



Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth Ahmad Alhendawi. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

27 October - Meeting for the first time since arriving in Azerbaijan for the United Nations-backed Global Forum on Youth Policies, dozens of youth experts and activists today deliberated a “common narrative” that will best engage other stakeholders and help transform youth policy rhetoric into solid reality.

“We must take the conversation from talking to each other to talking to ‘the other,’” said the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi, today, as he spearheaded an informal discussion on how to strengthen communication and collaboration.

Because the issues and interests of today’s youth are so expansive, it will take engaging non-traditional actors to get support and real commitment. That includes getting Ministries of Labour, Finance, and Education involved in a dialogue with youth activists and experts, he added.

The Global Forum on Youth Policies kicks off tomorrow in Azerbaijan’s coastal capital city Baku, where 700 youth experts from governments and parliaments, youth networks and movement, research and development communities will gather for three days to discuss an array of concerns concerning young people from employment and mental health to crime and security.

The Forum runs through 30 October and is expected to produce an outcome document outlining on how to strengthen implementation of the World Programme of Action on Youth – adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1995.

Spotlighting the connection between resources and countries’ ability to do something tangible, Mr. Alhendawi said that “youth policy without a budget is a mental exercise.”

Several other participants pointed out that some countries simply do not have the capacity to address youth concerns. Developing countries in particular struggle to find the resources. The budget allocated to youth policy of one nation might 100 times larger than the budget of a poor country.

One way of dealing with this is to hone the focus on several goals or areas of interest rather than just one, said University of South Wales Professor, Howard Williamson, who also spoke on behalf of the Council of Europe, a Forum co-convenor. Youth policy, he added, does not need rewriting but refreshing. Most countries have similar youth policy, the main different is their economic resources.

One youth delegate participating in today’s informal talks, said even more crucial is simplifying youth policy so that it is understood by the people it targets.

“We cannot spend two hours reading something to understand what youth policy is all about,” said 27-year-old Vinicius Tsugue, President of the student-run International Association of Students in Economic and Commercial Sciences (AIESEC).

Travelling from Brazil, he said the Forum is “extremely” important for his organization, he described as “run by youth, for youth.” Present in over 113 countries, AIESEC’s work and direction for the next five years will be directly shaped by the outcome of this week’s forum.

After all, to be effective youth organizations must align what is happening internally with what is happening to global youth policy. Hence, youth policy must be simple, practical, and understandable.

“I hope policy becomes something that is implementable, something that I am doing by volunteering, having my own start-up and where I could see that these youth policies are supporting me because if the youth policy is too complicated, it’s

something that we are not going to use so much.” Mr. Tsugue added.

Already putting that philosophy into practice is local student, Gamar Alizade, 20, who in the midst of completing her law degree at Baku, University, has managed to volunteer at “seven or eight” international events held in Azerbaijan since freshman year.

“Volunteering is a good way for young people to express themselves, to take part in new events, meet new people, discover new cultures, and in a way, even discover themselves,” Ms. Alizade said.

Taking a front row seat next to experts from various UN agencies and international partners, Ms. Alizade assists in organizing participants and making sure the meeting runs smoothly. She said that while she is not paid, by volunteering she is gaining real world experience.

“It’s a good way to develop skills and become a better professional in the future. We are getting the same experience as those who are employed. And also it’s a good policy of the State to get young people attracted in volunteering because it develops really good leaders in the future,” she added.

UN’s Ban, global leaders join forces in multi-billion dollar Horn of Africa pledge

27 October - Spearheading a high-level delegation of global and regional leaders in a visit to the Horn of Africa, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today announced a new \$8 billion development initiative aimed at boosting economic growth, reducing poverty and spurring business activity across the African region’s eight countries.

The announcement came as the Secretary-General touched down in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at the start of a joint trip uniting the capacities of the United Nations, World Bank, European Union, Islamic Development Bank, and African Development Bank and targeting a swathe of countries in the Horn of Africa, spanning Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

“The countries of the Horn of Africa are making important yet unheralded progress in economic growth and political stability. Now is a crucial moment to support those efforts, end the cycles of conflict and poverty, and move from fragility to sustainability,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared in a press release.

Mr. Ban added that the UN was leading the international delegation “to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach towards peace, security and development in the Horn of Africa.”

The Horn of Africa is not only a vastly diverse region but also boasts some of the fastest growing economies and “huge untapped natural resources,” the UN said, noting that there were also a number of contradictions in the region, including “many extraordinarily poor people,” widespread unemployment among growing numbers of young people, and “huge obstacles” facing women.

In addition, many countries in the region are vulnerable to piracy, corruption and drug trafficking, or subjected to flare-ups in violence at the hands of militant and terrorist groups. From a humanitarian perspective, some of the countries also find themselves in a precarious situation. A recent UN humanitarian report on Somalia, for instance, indicated that more than three million people in the country are now in need of assistance – up 20 per cent compared to six months ago.

However, according to a new World Bank study, significant change is already projected for the region as Kenya, Uganda and possibly Somalia and Ethiopia gear up for oil production. To that point, the financing pledges will serve to bolster regional development amid an already dynamic and shifting economic landscape.

“This new financing represents a major new opportunity for the people of the Horn of Africa to make sure they get access to



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) and Jim Yong Kim (left), President of the World Bank, meet with Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, during their trip to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

clean water, nutritious food, health care, education, and jobs,” said World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, as he pledged his Group’s \$1.8 billion for regional cross-border activities aimed at boosting overall economic development.

The World Bank’s financial input will be joined by the European Union’s pledge of \$3.7 billion until 2020, the African Development Bank’s pledge of \$1.8 billion over the next three years, and the Islamic Development Bank’s \$1 billion to be targeted at its four member countries in the Horn of Africa – Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda.

“There is greater opportunity now for the Horn of Africa to break free from its cycles of drought, food insecurity, water insecurity, and conflict by building up regional security, generating a peace dividend, especially among young women and men, and spurring more cross-border cooperation,” the World Bank President said.

This is the third African trip in the span of 18 months for both the Secretary-General and World Bank President. In 2013, the two travelled to the Great Lakes and Sahel regions to promote peace and development and pledge \$2.7 billion for regional programs aimed at improving health, education, nutrition, access to energy and job training.

UN agriculture chief lauds ‘key’ role of family farmers in food-secure future



Family poultry production is an important component of the livelihoods of many small farmers in developing countries. Photo: FAO/Giuseppe Bizzarri

27 October - Praising family farmers for their key role in meeting the needs of a growing world population, the head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) stressed the need to seize global momentum to improve the widespread food insecurity still haunting many rural areas around the world.

Speaking today at the opening of a two-day Global Dialogue on Family Farming in Rome, Director-General José Graziano da Silva said that family farmers are “central to what FAO does, to what the world wants and to what the world needs: a sustainable and food secure future.”

Addressing the paradox facing family farmers worldwide, Mr. Graziano da Silva underscored that the rural areas susceptible to food insecurity are the same areas that serve as the breadbaskets for their communities and the world at large.

The Director-General stressed that governments, farmers’ organizations and the private sector must galvanize concrete action to look beyond production and acknowledge family farms as transmitters of knowledge and central allies in providing healthier diets, including through strong local food systems that link farms to schools and communities.

Mr. Graziano da Silva also noted the attention that family farming is receiving in the post-2015 development agenda, adding that “perhaps the greatest success of the International Year is the strong political commitment we achieved.” He said that the success could be seen in the attention that family farming was receiving in the post-2015 development agenda.

The Global Dialogue brings together family farmers and their organizations, government representatives, civil society, private sector, academia and development agencies to take stock of progress thus far and identify key areas of work and international collaboration related to family farming beyond 2014.

Also in attendance at the opening were Sándor Fazekas, Minister of Agriculture of Hungary; Carlos Casamiquela, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fishery of Argentina; Nicos Kouyialis, Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment of Cyprus; Amadou Diallo, Minister and High Commissioner of the 3N Initiative of Niger; and Ana María Baiardi, Minister for Woman of Paraguay.

The Global Dialogue on Family Farming comes two weeks after governments agreed on a 60-point Framework of Action on Nutrition that is expected to be adopted at the upcoming Second International Conference on Nutrition, which will be held in Rome from 19-21 November.

The closing of the International Year of Family Farming is scheduled to take place on 27 November in the Philippines.

Young people in 'driver's seat' from very beginning of policy process a must – UN experts



Young Malian man spotlights need to enhance policies for youth as part of campaign ahead of United Nations-backed Youth Policy Forum in Baku, Azerbaijan, 28-30 October. Photo: Youth Policy Forum

27 October - Rather than merely being consulted on policy matters, young people must be in the driver's seat with all the other stakeholders from the very beginning of the process and throughout, a Youth Specialist of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stressed ahead of the Global Forum on Youth Policies, kicking off tomorrow in Baku, Azerbaijan.

In an interview with the *UN News Centre*, Maria Kypriotou said that regarding youth participation in political processes, the most important element is engaging young people from the very design of the process itself through implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

“It is important to work from the national to the local and then from the local to the national, top down and bottom up,” said Ms. Kypriotou, stressing the need for flexible, inclusive and gender-sensitive mechanisms that will enable youth participation at all different levels of policy.

The Global Forum on Youth Policies, which opens tomorrow in Baku and runs through 30 October, will bring together for the first time in a global conference, 700 youth policy experts including governments and parliaments, youth networks and movement, research and development communities.

“This must be the starting point for young people to realize their rights, what they can do, what they can claim and what they are responsible for,” said Kypriotou.

Outlining several ways to more effectively engage young people, Ms. Kypriotou noted that combining formal and non-formal ways of interacting through investing in information and communication technologies (ICT) will have a major impact on youth participation. More so now as the rise of social media has empowered young people to make their voices heard.

Empowering people in ministries who are designing and implementing policies is also instrumental as is investing in civic education and building the skills of young people to engage as active citizens in political processes. This can be done through the formal setting such as schools and informal systems through civil society.

Ms. Kypriotou's colleague at UNESCO, Alexander Schischlik, Chief of Section for Social and Human Sciences, said that he hoped the Forum would produce a “common understanding” on what modern youth policy should look like.

“Instead of talking about things, [we want] to show that it can happen and move on upstream policy and action on the ground,” Mr. Schischlik told UN News Centre.

Through an “enormous good-practice exchange” participants will learn from each other and achieve concrete results far from “vagueness”. It is “extremely thrilling and rewarding” that UN agencies will have a chance to engage such a diverse group of young people at the gathering.

In the last 20 years, UNESCO, has made strides in education, culture, and communication, and has also embraced a strategy on how to deal with youth not only policy formation but also in various facets of development.

Because of its expansive mandate, UNESCO has engaged the education sector, promoting technical and vocational training. Young people are encouraged to engage in new media as well as social media as a means of communicating effectively and reach a wider audience. With culture, the focus has been shaping identity beyond social norms that have existed for years,

said Mr. Schischlik.

This multi-sectoral approach, which the United Nations and its agencies have embraced over the past two decades, not only contributes effectively to the formulation of youth policy, it also gives that very policy context.

Director of Governance and Peacebuilding in the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Patrick Keuleers said that his organization also convening the Forum believes in empowering the world's 1.8 billion youths.

Calling the 1995 World Programme of Action on Youth a "major milestone in how we deal with youth and development", he said that implementation has not always been as successful as hoped.

A key aim of the Forum will be to gather world leaders, ministers of youth, vice ministers, youth organizations and international organization to take stock of youth policies, and what has worked and what has not worked since the adoption of the World Programme of Action.

"What we really would like to see is far stronger attention paid to the importance of youth policy not just as written statements, but really making sure that they also see the importance of the implementation of youth policies by having the right institutions, the right mandates, the right coordination which is often an issue in implementing youth policy," he said.

UNDP has taken measures to empower young people through its Youth Strategy 2014-2017 approved in March to address challenges young people face in terms of access to equal opportunities to jobs and having a voice in decisions which affect their lives. There's also been progress made on the inter-agency front, which brings together UN agencies to ensure collaborative efforts.

"An important boost [for youth issues] was the appointment last year of the Secretary General's Special Envoy on youth, with whom we collaborate very, very closely. So we've seen over the last years, a tremendous dynamic within the UN on bringing the agencies together around the importance of youth," Mr. Keuleers said.

It is high-time that youth are seen as an opportunity to make a real difference and contribute to the transformative change needed to support the World We Want and the post-2015 agenda. While engagement of youth in the political process is extremely important, it is also not sufficient.

"I would like to stress again that for us it is also important that we do not only focus on the political aspect but that we also see the economic empowerment of youth as an extremely important pillar of the process," Mr. Keuleers said.

In terms of elections, getting young people much more involved in civic education and electoral processes. UNDP is involved in a number of countries on constitution-making and reform as many of these processes take place in post conflict countries.

Engaging young people at the local level where they can actually improve policy-making and implementation by supporting municipal councils and youth advisory boards at the local level. Youth Caucuses within political parties must have a particular say in how parties develop their policy. Also important is the work being done to engage youth on the debate of accountability, transparency and anti-corruption programmes.

Ebola: UN mission concludes visits to affected countries. Presents 'robust' recovery plan



At UN Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD) warehouse in Accra, Ghana, UNMEER's head, Anthony Banbury, speaks to some international media outlets on the latest developments in the Ebola Response. Photo: UNMEER

27 October - The head of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) has wrapped up his visits to the three West African countries battling the Ebola outbreak as part of the Organization's ongoing efforts to drum up international support in tackling the deadly crisis, it was announced today.

Over the past week, UNMEER chief, Anthony Banbury, met with the Presidents of Guinea, Sierra Leone and, on Friday, Liberia, in a series of consultations focusing on how an operational framework for international efforts could be "adapted and implemented to best support the ongoing national responses," the mission said in a press release.

In addition to his consultations with the leaders, he also engaged in a series of meetings with national and international partners and visits to health facilities under construction to hear and see first-hand how efforts to stop the Ebola virus are progressing.

Developed in a recent high-level meeting of senior UN officials and external stakeholders from the World Bank, the United States' Centers for Disease Control, and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the UN operational framework was designed to provide a UN response specific to the needs of each country while maintaining the centrality of national ownership.

The Governments of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone – each of which has the final decision on the overall approach and strategy for dealing with Ebola in their respective countries – have national response plans in place and have been responding to the crisis for many months. Those Governments provided input and direction on the operational framework.

"The framework sets out the step-by-step process on how the UN and international partners could support the three governments on achieving the overarching objective of assisting them to become Ebola-free," UNMEER explained, while underlining its "immediate objective" of 70 per cent of Ebola cases treated and 70 per cent of burials carried out safely by properly trained and equipped teams by 1 December.

The Special Representative's meetings were also aimed at providing him with the opportunity to learn more about the current situation in each country so that UNMEER's resources are well-placed to be effective in the continuously evolving situation on the ground.

Mr. Banbury's meetings with President of Guinea, Alpha Condé, President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, and with President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, provided inputs and direction for the refining and updating of the operational framework, the UN mission noted. In addition, it would now serve as a guide to be followed by all UN agencies, funds and programmes and form the basis for the UN Ebola Crisis Managers in each country as they engage with their national counterparts.

In Liberia – his second visit to the country since being named UNMEER chief and where he wrapped up his trip this past Friday – he visited Tubmanburg, a town north-west of Monrovia, to see the Ebola treatment unit being built by the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) with the support of United States military.

Praising the dedicated and speedy work of the AFL, Mr. Banbury said the facility was nearly complete and medical staff was shortly expected to arrive to begin testing at the facility. Meanwhile, in his earlier visit to Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, Mr. Banbury inspected the safe burials operations room for the city's western district.

“All of what I discussed and saw – from my talks with the leaders of each country and my visits to medical facilities being put in place for both Ebola victims and responders, to seeing the level of cooperation between national and international partners such as the AFL and the US military and the Sierra Leonean government and AGI – leads me to believe that we are on right track,” Mr. Banbury said upon his return to UNMEER’s headquarters in Ghana. “There are no differences among us and we have an unparalleled unity of purpose.”

But, the UNMEER head warned, “that does not mean we can afford to let up for a moment.”

“Time is of the essence and we need international support to be ramped up, from more medical supplies to more health care workers in all three countries,” he continued. “Only then, when Ebola is stopped, can the people of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone return to a life free from the fear of this deadly virus.”

Meanwhile, addressing reporters earlier today during his trip to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon emphasized the importance of UNMEER’s role in helping to coordinate the international fight against Ebola and raised the call for more funding for the global response efforts.

“The curve of transmission can be bent down if the needed resources and organization are available,” he said. “We must intensify our efforts in achieving a substantial increase in materials and financial contributions to save lives and protect communities.”

Mr. Ban added that health workers who had plunged into the thick of the crisis were “exceptional people who are giving to humanity” and urged governments and people to avoid stigmatizing them for their “selfless service.”

“We depend on them to fight this battle. Please do not quarantine them because they have volunteered to serve in the affected countries,” he appealed.

According to the UN World Health Organization’s latest situation report, there have been 9,936 cases of Ebola and 4,877 deaths so far. Despite some positive developments against the disease in Senegal and Nigeria, which have been declared Ebola-free, the UN health agency has warned that some countries may be under-reporting their rates of infection, particularly in the three most affected countries – Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone – where the situation has been continuously deteriorating.

Ban hails Tunisian vote as critical step as country continues transition to democracy

27 October - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today congratulated the Tunisian people on the legislative elections held in the North African country on 26 October, welcoming the polls as a “crucial step for the country’s future” and a “decisive milestone in the transition to democracy.”

“Just as this moment comes with a great deal of hope, there remain a number of crucial tasks ahead for the next Government,” Mr. Ban added in a statement issued by his spokesperson. “The United Nations stands ready to support Tunisia in this respect.”



UN Photo/Steve Tickner

The Secretary-General visited Tunisia in mid-October, meeting with President Moncef Marzouki and pledging the Organization’s full support for the North African nation as it continues along the road to democracy.

Last January, Tunisia’s Parliament adopted the constitution, the country’s first since massive public demonstrations ousted President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in early 2011, the first regime to be toppled in the so-called Arab Spring.

In his statement, Mr. Ban also extended his congratulations to the Tunisian electoral authorities for their efforts in organizing the polling and for their continued work on the presidential elections scheduled for next month.

Blackwater convictions spotlight need for treaty on private security – UN experts



Credit: OHCHR

27 October - The United Nations working group on the use of mercenaries today appealed for stronger global regulations of private security, saying last week's conviction of Blackwater contractors shows the need for all private security personnel to be held accountable for international human rights and humanitarian law violations.

"We welcome the fact that prosecutions were finally brought, putting an end to the cycle of impunity that prevailed since 2007 and aggravated the suffering of victims and their families," said Patricia Arias, who currently heads the five-member group of independent human rights experts.

"However, such examples of accountability are the exception rather than the rule," Ms. Arias said.

"The difficulty in bringing a prosecution in this case shows the need for an international treaty to address the increasingly significant role that private military companies play in transnational conflicts," she said.

The expert body's appeal comes seven years after the killing of 17 Iraqi civilians, including children, by Blackwater personnel in Baghdad's Nissour Square. On 22 October, four Blackwater contractors involved in the killings were prosecuted and convicted of manslaughter and murder by U.S. federal jury.

The UN working group has focused specific attention on the need for an international convention to effectively regulate corporate actors whose operations pose potential threats to human rights.

"The outsourcing of security to these companies by States create risks for human rights, hence the need to regulate their activities," Ms. Arias said.

Given the transnational nature of many private military and security companies' activities and the flexible corporate structures in the industry, Ms. Arias' group has advocated for the international community to reach some consensus on the minimum standards of regulation of private military and security companies.

"The prosecutions of Blackwater contractors signal that human rights violations committed by private military and security companies cannot remain unpunished, and provide a strong deterrent against their repetition," Ms. Arias said.

The Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination was established in 2005 by the then Commission on Human Rights. It is composed of five independent experts serving in their personal capacities: Ms. Patricia Arias (Chairperson-Rapporteur, Chile), Mr. Anton Katz (South Africa), Mr. Gabor Rona (United States/Hungary), Ms. Elzbieta Karska (Poland) and Mr. Saeed Mokbil (Yemen).

"There can be no justice without effective accountability and redress mechanisms for victims," Ms. Arias said. "States have a responsibility to ensure that victims and their families have equal and effective access to justice, as well as adequate, effective and prompt reparation for the harm suffered."

The UN human rights experts are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN human rights system, is the general name of the independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms of the Council that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world.

Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They

are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

Citing 'surge' in executions, UN expert voices deep concern about right to life in Iran

27 October - The human rights situation in Iran remains of deep concern, an independent United Nations expert said today, flagging issues related to the right to life, the judicial system, religious persecution, and discrimination against women.

Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, spoke to reporters in New York ahead of the presentation of his latest report to the General Assembly committee dealing with human rights issues (Third Committee) tomorrow.



Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran Ahmed Shaheed briefs the press. UN Photo/Cia Pak

“The main concerns in my report deal with issues of right to life,” he stated, adding that he has observed a “surge” in executions in the country in the past 12 to 15 months.

At least 852 individuals were reportedly executed between July 2013 and June 2014, representing an “alarming” increase in the number of executions in relation to the already-high rates of previous years, he wrote in his report.

“The Government also continues to execute juvenile offenders,” he added. “In 2014 alone, eight individuals believed to be under 18 years of age at the time of their alleged crimes were reportedly executed.”

Mr. Shaheed also noted a “widening of the range of offenses” for which people are put to death, including economic crimes and what are clearly political activities.

As pointed out in the report, the new Islamic Penal Code that entered into force in 2013 now omits references to apostasy, witchcraft and heresy, but continues to allow for juvenile executions and retains the death penalty for activities that do not constitute most serious crimes in line with the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty such as adultery, repeated alcohol use, and drug possession and trafficking.

The expert said he was “shocked” by the execution over the weekend of Reyhaneh Jabbari, a young woman who was hanged in a Tehran prison for killing a man she said was trying to sexually abuse her.

Mr. Shaheed had raised his concerns about Ms. Jabbari’s trial with the Government on several occasions but had not received satisfactory replies.

He also cited concerns about the rights of lawyers; the right to expression, association and assembly; and extensive measures taken by the Government to restrict access to information.

Religious persecution also remains a concern, he said, noting that there are at least 300 people in detention for their religious practices.

“Of increasing concern to me is the worsening situation of women in the country,” Mr. Shaheed added, noting that, among other things, the number of women enrolled in university has decreased from 62 per cent to 48 per cent over a two-year period. Other concerns include the lack of opportunities for women in the workplace, as well as wage disparities.

Early and forced marriages are another major concern, the expert said. The legal age of marriage for girls in the country is 13 years, but girls as young as 9 years of age may be married with permission from a court.

According to the report, at least 48,580 girls between 10 and 14 years of age were married in 2011, 48,567 of whom were reported to have had at least one child before they reached 15 years of age.

Some 40,635 marriages of girls under 15 years of age were also registered between March 2012 and March 2013, of which

more than 8,000 involved men who were at least 10 years older. Furthermore, at least 1,537 marriages of girls under 10 years of age were registered in 2012, which is a significant increase compared with the 716 registered between March 2010 and March 2011.

The number of registered divorces for girls under 15 years of age has also consistently increased since 2010, the report added. The Government has responded by stating that the law prohibits forced marriage, meaning that all marriages in the country are consensual.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

Mr. Shaheed has not been allowed entry into Iran since he took up his post in 2011. He has prepared his reports based on numerous official Government sources, interviews with Iranians both inside and outside the country and reports sent to him by credible human rights organizations.

South Sudan: 60 civilians injured in fighting near UN base

27 October - More than 60 civilians were injured yesterday after fighting broke at a protection of civilians site next to the United Nations House on the outskirts of Juba, South Sudan, according to a UN spokesperson.

The UN Mission in the country (UNMISS) reported that four of the injured civilians are in serious condition, while two armed UN police officers suffered minor injuries in the melee. Tear gas and warning shots were fired to halt the rioting.

“By late afternoon yesterday, however, the situation was brought under control,” said UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric at a press briefing. “The Mission is investigating the cause of the rioting, and two suspects have been detained by UN Police on suspicion of allegedly instigating the violence,” he added.

Some 11,000 civilians are being protected by UNMISS at the site where the fighting broke out, while more than 100,000 civilians are housed at such sites nationwide.

In related news, Mr. Dujarric noted that \$637 million is still required to maintain humanitarian aid operations in South Sudan until year’s end. Thus far, 61 per cent of the \$1.8 billion requested has been received. In all, aid agencies in South Sudan have reached 3.5 million of the 3.8 million people targeted with some form of aid this year.

Egypt: Ban, Security Council condemn deadly terrorist attacks in Sinai

25 October - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations Security Council have strongly condemned two terrorist attacks that targeted military checkpoints in the Sinai Peninsula.

The attacks took place yesterday in Sheikh Zuweid and al-Arish in North Sinai, killing at least 31 members of the Egyptian security forces and injuring dozens more, noted a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson.

“The Secretary-General extends his deep condolences to the families of the victims and the Government of Egypt, and hopes for the quick and full recovery of the wounded,” it stated.

The 15-member Security Council issued a statement to the press, in which it condemned the attacks “in the strongest terms”



Children at play in the Protection of Civilians (POC) camp III, near the UN House in Juba. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras (file)

and extended its condolences.

“The members of the Security Council reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivation, wherever and whenever and by whomsoever committed,” said the statement.

According to media reports, a three-month state of emergency has been declared in parts of the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt's Rafah crossing into the Gaza Strip has been closed.