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'Children urgently need our protection,' warns UN child rights envoy as casualties mount in Yemen



Children attend a puppet theatre in the Al-Mahareeq area in Aden, Yemen.
Photo: UNICEF Yemen/Yassir Abdul-Baqi

1 April - Alarmed by the rising number of child casualties in Yemen, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui today urged all parties involved in military operations "avoid creating new risks" for crisis-torn country's children and to adhere to international law.

Over the past week alone, 62 children were killed and 30 others injured in Yemen, according to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

"I am alarmed by the rising number of child casualties in Yemen," said Leila Zerrougui in a statement. "Children urgently need our protection. We cannot tolerate seeing them victims of this conflict."

Ms. Zerrougui said that the conflict continues to impact access to education and healthcare for Yemeni children and urged the protection of both schools and hospitals.

"All parties involved in military operations in Yemen must avoid creating new risks for children," Zerrougui added. "They must act in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law."

In the past few months, the UN has verified an increase in the recruitment of children, notably by Al Houthi/Ansar Allah and other armed groups. The number of children maimed has also been on the rise.

Also today, the Yemen Humanitarian Coordinator, Johannes Van Der Klaauw, said he was appalled to learn of the killing of a volunteer with the Yemen Red Crescent Society (YRCS) in Al Dhale'e in southern Yemen, on Monday.

“Humanitarian workers are putting their lives at risk every day in Yemen to provide critical, life-saving assistance to millions of Yemenis. Their courage and dedication are unsurpassed,” he said in a statement from Amman, Jordan.

Mr. Van Der Klaauw appealed to all parties to the conflict to ensure freedom of movement and access for humanitarian workers to carry out their work in safety, as well as unfettered access to those in need. This includes allowing the free and safe movement of humanitarian aid supplies into and within Yemen.

The incident has been confirmed by Yemen's Ministry of Health and humanitarian partners working in the health sector.

“I am also deeply concerned by reports of mounting civilian casualties and continued destruction and damage to civilian infrastructure,” he said, calling on all parties to observe their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and the means to provide them with access to food and livelihoods and other vital services.

The escalating conflict has put immense strain on health facilities. Some hospitals are functions at minimum capacity and medicines are in short supply. To date, the World Health Organization (WHO) has provided interagency emergency health kits for more than 80,000 people, as well as blood bags, oxygen cylinders with regulators, and IV fluids.

“Communities across Yemen have been caught up in attacks and cross-fire, endangering the lives and health of the young and old, and even people already displaced by violence,” said Dr. Ahmed Shadoul, WHO Representative in Yemen.

Hospitals in all affected governorates are in urgent need of oxygen supplies, medicines and supplies for treating trauma wounds, life-saving equipment and medicines, additional health staff and additional bed capacity. Due to the violence, there are also concerns about the ability of ambulances and other vehicles to transport injured people to hospitals to receive care, as well as the availability of fuel for ambulances and hospital generators.

The country's second largest hospital in Sana'a City has been partially evacuated due to its proximity to a military base, and full evacuation is expected to take place soon. In some areas, where populations are unable to leave due to the violence, health facilities, including ambulances, are unable to cope with the number of casualties.

UN Economic, Social body to launch network tackling 'monumental' global employment challenge



Wide view of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) concluded its three-day discussion on boosting integration of the three pillars of sustainable development. UN Photo/Loey Felipe

1 April - As the Economic and Social Council concluded its three-day segment on boosting integration of the three pillars of sustainable development, the body's Vice-President said he would work with the United Nations labour agency to follow-up on delegates' work by launching an international entity to help address the issue of providing employment and decent work to people around the world.

“I am pleased to inform you that I and the Director-General of ILO are working towards launching a Global Network of Stakeholders on Employment Creation and Decent Work for Sustainable Development,” said Vladimir Drobnjak, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). “We are holding consultations with the potential members of this network. This network will be Council's contribution towards addressing this global challenge of monumental proportions.”

Mr. Drobnjak said the outcome of this week's work would serve as an important contribution to ECOSOC's high-level segment, including the high-level political forum on sustainable development and he stressed his confidence that countries and regions had had an opportunity to learn important lessons from one another regarding the issues at hand.

“The discussions we led and the conclusions we draw from this segment can provide additional food for thought in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda, in particular relating to SDG 8,” he said. “The integration segment has inspired some concrete policy recommendations and action-oriented solutions to promote policy coherence in economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development for the promotion of full employment and decent work for all.”

He listed highlights of the discussions that took place, including the idea that insufficient demand had been resulted from recent economic growth, meaning that jobs had not been generated and that fiscal policies such as a carbon tax and a financial transaction tax could help stimulate the economy.

He also noted calls for greater policy coherence, for making dignity and prosperity the norm in labour markets, for greater participation of women and for formalisation of the informal economy through provision of social protection and job security.

Environmental sustainability and job creation were mutually reinforcing, he said, pointing out that transition to more environmentally sustainable approaches can have a positive impact on job creation, quality and productivity. The transition to a green economy had to be a just transition for workers.

Mr. Drobnjak also stressed that infrastructure and industrialization would be critical pillars for economic growth and job creation in Africa and underlined the need for Africa to get its fair share of the 600 million new jobs that the global economy needed to add.

The Director-General of the ILO, Guy Ryder, and Assistant Secretary-General Thomas Gass from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs also made closing remarks, with Mr. Ryder lauding ECOSOC's efforts and partnership on the issue of employment at the UN.

"Our deliberations over the past three days have generated a rich exchange of views and experiences illustrating the inextricable link between decent work and sustainable development," he said.

Mr. Gass underlined the importance of a strong ECOSOC Integration Segment to offer substantive and strategic policy guidance in the years ahead, particularly in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

"It should continue to engage policy makers and the UN system in the promotion of a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development around ECOSOC's annual theme," he said.

Iraq: UN envoy welcomes armed forces victory against ISIL in Tikrit

1 April - The top UN official in Iraq has welcomed the recent victories of the Iraqi Security Forces in liberating the town of Tikrit from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and associated armed groups.

"It is a victory for all the Iraqi people, and the United Nations stands ready to assist the provincial and national authorities in responding to the needs of the thousands of displaced," Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, said in a press release issued earlier today.

"Civilians' safety and security must be protected in line with fundamental human rights principles and humanitarian law," he continued.

Amid ongoing fighting between Iraqi Government forces and ISIL and continuing sectarian tensions across society, the Middle Eastern country is facing a period of immense peace and security challenges.

The country is also being tested by fiscal constraints and the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, also known as UNAMI and which Mr. Kubiš heads, is currently working actively with the authorities to set up a Recovery and Reconstruction fund, while the challenge posed by supporting persons displaced by conflict also remains huge.

Overall, 5.2 million people need humanitarian assistance, of whom 2.25 million are displaced and 235,000 are refugees from Syria, with the population of the Kurdistan Region having increased by 30 per cent because of the influx.



Iraqi IDP family in Tikrit inside the unfinished building that is their temporary home. Photo: UNHCR/C. Robinson

In the press release, Mr. Kubiš also added his call for the Iraqi Government to ensure that all inhabitants of Tikrit who fled from ISIL can safely return to their homes and urged for much needed humanitarian assistance to be provided without delay.

Meanwhile, UNAMI also released March casualty figures for Iraq, which reveal that a total of 997 Iraqis were killed and another 2,172 were injured in acts of terrorism and violence during the month. The number of civilians killed was 729 (including 42 civilian police), and the number of civilians injured was 1,785 (including 98 civilian police).

Baghdad was the worst affected Governorate with 1,290 civilian casualties (362 killed, 928 injured). Diyala suffered 51 killed and 75 injured; Salahadin suffered 34 killed and 48 injured, and Ninewa 20 killed and 15 injured.

According to information obtained by UNAMI from the Health Directorate in Anbar, the Governorate suffered a total of 939 civilian casualties (237 killed and 702 injured). This included 58 killed and 391 injured in Ramadi and 179 killed and 311 injured in Fallujah.

“I am shocked to see that Iraqis continue to bear the brunt of appalling numbers of casualties caused by successive waves of violence, which are threatening with additional suffering and misery,” Mr. Kubiš said in a separate press release.

“The United Nations calls upon the Government of Iraq to do all it can to ensure that civilians’ safety and security is protected in line with fundamental human rights principles and humanitarian law”, the UN envoy further stated.

‘Roots of conflict’ must be addressed to defeat Boko Haram, says top UN rights official



High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein addresses a special session of the Human Rights Council on Boko Haram. UN Photo /Jean-Marc Ferré

1 April - Expansive economic, social and political opportunities are key to reducing Nigeria’s smouldering ethnic and sectarian tensions and countering the growing threat posed by Boko Haram, the top United Nations human rights official declared today.

“Profound inequalities, corruption, and resulting marginalization, naturally generate discontent. And the more marginalized and desperate the people, the more likely they are to turn to radical and violent movements,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

In opening remarks to the Council’s 23rd special session, on terrorist attacks, abuses and violations committed by Boko Haram, Mr. Zeid warned that the increasingly appalling atrocities perpetrated by the terrorist group had spawned “a critical human rights situation” in northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region that could only be tempered through development initiatives.

Since 2009, when the Boko Haram insurgency resorted to wide-scale violence, more than 15,000 people have been killed, countless children, women and men have been abducted, abused and forcibly recruited, and women and girls have been targeted for particularly horrific abuse, including sexual enslavement, the UN rights chief continued.

“This despicable and wanton carnage, which constitutes a clear and urgent menace for development, peace and security, must be stopped,” said Mr. Zeid. “Boko Haram’s leaders must know that they will be held accountable in a court of law for these appalling violations of human rights.”

The terror caused by Boko Haram have also provoked the instability of Nigeria’s north and spilled over the country’s borders, affecting the wider region and displacing over a million people.

According to the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), in fact, the latest movements of refugees across Nigeria’s borders are expected to bring the total of Nigerian refugees in Cameroon to nearly 66,000.

Elsewhere in the region, refugee numbers are also rising. Some 18,000 people have fled to western Chad, including more than 15,000 since early January after Boko Haram’s offensive against the town of Baga in Nigeria’s Borno state. At the same time, more than 100,000 people have already found refuge in Niger despite a steadily deteriorating humanitarian

situation and a spike in insurgent attacks against the towns of Bosso and Diffa.

The refugee crisis is also compounding the economic stability of the area. A recent World Food Programme (WFP) food security and vulnerability assessment in Niger in November 2014 showed that a total of 52.7 per cent of displaced households and their host families were severely – 14 per cent – or moderately – 38.7 per cent – food insecure, and in need of food assistance.

Meanwhile, the UN human rights chief warned that what had begun as a localized crisis in Nigeria was “fast growing to very disturbing regional dimensions,” adding that Boko Haram’s intensified incursions were spreading “bloodshed and desolation even more widely.”

As a result, he said, “strong, coordinated, and principled” responses were critical to stemming the tide of the terrorist group’s hostilities. In recent weeks, in fact, military offensives by Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger have already led to the recapture of several towns from Boko Haram, prompting some optimism that a reversal in the region’s security situation may be forthcoming.

Nevertheless, Mr. Zeid emphasized the need for a “thorough and clear-sighted consideration of the possible roots of conflict,” suggesting that greater participation in decision-making, improved services, and broader economic, social and political opportunities were elemental to building an inclusive society devoid of the tensions that feed extremism.

“Solutions can never be found if the real dimensions of the problem at hand are denied,” he affirmed.

“Vanquishing this threat to peace will require sustained attention that extends beyond the use of military force. Strengthening the rule of law, repealing discriminatory legislation, and implementing inclusive and non-discriminatory policies must be part of the response to the violations committed by Boko Haram.”

“We must also reflect on some of the possible root causes of this insurgency,” continued Mr. Zeid, strongly encouraging a concerted effort to redress the imbalances so evident in Nigeria’s eastern region, with particular efforts in the territory that has fortunately been recovered from Boko Haram’s grasp.

“In this regard, I welcome Nigeria’s recent Presidential Initiative for the Northeast, which aims to address longstanding social and economic issues, and to create the context necessary for sustainable recovery and economic development,” he said.

It’s about ‘more than mines’ senior UN official says ahead of International Day of Action



Unexploded ordnance (UXO) in and around the Goma-Kibati area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) being cleared. UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti

1 April - As the world marks the tenth anniversary of the passing of the global mine ban treaty and commemorates International Mine Awareness Day, the head of the United Nations’ office dealing with the threat they pose stressed today the importance of looking beyond the effects of just anti-personnel mines.

Agnès Marcaillou, Director of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS), told reporters in New York the significance of the commemoration had expanded over the years and that now it was “mine awareness week” rather than just “mine awareness day.”

The theme for this year is ‘More Than Mines’, she said, explaining that an evolution had taken place since the mid-1990s, when the focus had been on anti-personnel landmines and civil society had rallied together to conclude a treaty banning landmines that had since become a cornerstone of international humanitarian law.

She said that since then, the remit of UNMAS had expanded and it was now applying its expertise to an increasingly wide range of explosive hazards that kill and maim people every day. Work on cluster munitions since the mine ban treaty resulted in a separate treaty banning their use, while unexploded ordnance (UXO) and ammunition were among the main

challenges keeping the body busy as they impacted an increasing number of communities. The threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) had also caused a reaction by the UN.

They disrupted peacekeeping operations and deliveries of humanitarian assistance and that disruption increased the bill. There were direct costs, along with indirect costs stemming from the slowness of reconstruction and delivery.

She pointed also to a high political cost, seen most clearly when the Security Council's mandates were not fulfilled because mines and the explosive remnants of war hampered efforts.

She stressed, however, that there is a bright side, which was that the threat posed can be mitigated and the weapons destroyed. To do that more money is required. With more money, more clearance teams could be paid for, which would mean that roads could be more quickly verified and a more coherent response ensured.

Syria: UN agency warns violence near refugee camp endangering thousands of Palestinians



A mother and child in Yarmouk, Syria.
Photo: UNRWA/Taghrid Mohammad

1 April - Fierce fighting has erupted between armed groups in the area of Yarmouk, a camp of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, putting thousands of people in danger, warned the spokesperson of the United Nations agency tasked with the ensuring the well-being of Palestinians across the Middle East.

“UNRWA is extremely concerned about the safety and protection of Syrian and Palestinian civilians in the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk in Damascus, where since early afternoon today, intensive armed conflict has been ongoing between armed groups present in the area,” Chris Gunness, spokesperson for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), said in a statement.

UNRWA is demanding all parties respect and comply with their obligations to ensure the protection of civilians in the camp and called for an end to the fighting and a return to conditions that will enable its staff to support and assist Yarmouk's civilians.

Some 18,000 civilians, including some 3,500 children, reside in Yarmouk and are at extreme risk of death, serious injury, trauma and displacement, said Mr. Gunness.

“The intense armed clashes put these children at risk of serious injury and death. The lives of these children must be protected,” he added, emphasizing that people have “suffered enough during Syria’s pitiless conflict.”

Earlier this week, on Tuesday at a donors’ conference in Kuwait, governments pledged a total of \$3.8 dollars to help the millions of people affected by the four-year Syria war, including Palestinian refugees.

In phone call, UN chief congratulates Nigeria's President-elect Buhari



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a phone call, congratulates President-elect Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

1 April - Taking note of the results of the Nigerian presidential and parliamentary elections announced yesterday, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called President-elect Muhammadu Buhari to congratulate him, and called on all Nigerians to accept the outcome of the elections.

“The Secretary-General talked to President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Major General (Rtd) Muhammadu Buhari. He congratulated President-elect Buhari and commended President Jonathan for his leadership throughout the electoral process and his statesmanship in upholding the democratic process,” said a note released by Mr. Ban's spokesman's office in New York.

“The Secretary-General believes the successful conduct of these polls is a testament to the maturity of Nigeria's democracy,” the statement added.

Mr. Ban also thanked the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for organizing and carrying out the elections in a professional manner under challenging circumstances. He also appealed to the Nigerian people to address any complaints they may have through existing legal and constitutional channels.

The UN chief also said that he hoped the same democratic spirit will prevail in the conduct of the Governorship and State House of Assembly elections on 11 April.

Thailand must end ‘criminalization’ of dissenting voices – UN expert

1 April - A United Nations human rights expert has urged the Government of Thailand to immediately and unequivocally distance itself from the “intimidating” statements made by its leader, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, in which he threatened the freedom and lives of the country's journalists.

The expert says that according to reports, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the leader of the military coup that deposed Thailand's elected Government in 2014 and, currently, the country's Prime Minister, recently declared that journalists who criticize him or “cause divisions” could be subjected to execution and that he enjoys “the power to close down the media, arrest people, order for people to be shot.”



Photo: UNAMI

“After a year of killings and terrible violence against journalists worldwide, such statements are simply outrageous,” the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, David Kaye, exclaimed in a news release issued today.

“Journalists of all kinds perform one of the most fundamental tasks in a democratic society, throwing light on whether and how Governments behave in accordance with the rule of law or engage in corruption and human rights abuses,” he added. “Intimidation of journalists is by definition an attack on the public's right to know.”

The UN expert called on the Thai Government to take immediate steps to lift the nationwide imposition of martial law and declared that freedom of expression and independent journalism were “essential” for building inclusive societies and democracies.

“Not only Governments and public officials should exhibit respect for the role of journalists, but actually should publicly condemn all forms of threats and attacks against journalists at the highest political level and ensure no one is subject to

intimidations,” Mr. Kaye continued.

“There is no sense that General Prayuth spoke in jest. But even if he did, the idea that the killing of journalists – let alone the shutting down of media in light of criticism – can be a laughing matter is reprehensible.”

The Special Rapporteur – who is, by UN statute, an independent and unremunerated expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council – also expressed concern with the increasing arrests and detentions under Thailand’s *lese majesté* law and Computer Crime Act and called for an end to the criminalization of dissenting opinions.

“This is particularly crucial now at the moment of drafting the new Constitution,” he concluded, “which will shape the future of the country.”

Ban appoints new head of UN Environment Programme’s New York office

1 April - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed Elliott Harris of Trinidad and Tobago as the new Assistant Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP) New York office, a spokesperson for the Organization announced today.

In his new role, Mr. Harris will play a central role in UNEP’s contribution to the post-2015 development agenda, the Rio+20 Summit outcomes as well as a number of inter-agency coordination mechanisms.

The Secretary-General’s spokesperson noted that Mr. Harris brings over 25 years of international experience in the fields of international economics and development policy analysis to his new UNEP position coupled with an already in-depth knowledge of the UN system, multilateral and inter-agency coordination processes.

Prior to joining the UN, Mr. Harris worked in the African Department and the Fiscal Affairs Department at the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In 2002, he became an Advisor in the Policy Development and Review department and was appointed, in 2008, as Special Representative to the UN.



Elliott Harris, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Head of the UNEP New York Office. Photo: UNEP

Widows’ eviction highlights need to abolish Tanzania’s discriminatory laws, UN experts say



Delegates attend a meeting of the Geneva-based Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Photo: Jean-Marc Ferré (file)

1 April - Tanzania should take steps to revise or repeal laws, customs and practices that discriminate against women, a United Nations Committee said today after considering the case of two widows who were prevented from inheriting their late husbands’ property and were left homeless.

The Geneva-based Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) issued its call after considering a complaint by the women, who under local customary laws could not inherit upon their respective husband’s death and were subsequently evicted from their homes by their in-laws.

In 2005, the women, referred to as E.S and S.C, began legal proceedings, arguing that inheritance provisions be struck down because they contravened Tanzania’s Constitution and the country’s international obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which it ratified in 1985.

In 2006, the High Court agreed that the provisions were discriminatory but said it would not overturn them as doing so would “be opening a Pandora’s box, with all the seemingly discriminative customs from our 120 tribes plus following the same path.”

Regarding widows, customary law – which is in force in 30 districts – states that they have “no share of the inheritance if the deceased left relatives of his clan; her share is to be cared for by her children, just as she cared for them.”

In its findings, the 23-member Committee said that Tanzania should grant the two women adequate reparation and compensation, noting that they had been left “economically vulnerable, with no property, no home to live in with their children and no form of financial support.” It also called on Tanzania to ensure that rights guaranteed under the Convention have precedence over discriminatory provisions.

States parties have an obligation to adopt measures to amend or abolish “not only existing laws and regulations, but also customs and practices that constitute discrimination against women.” This includes countries such as Tanzania that have “multiple legal systems in which different personal status laws apply to individuals on the basis of identity factors such as ethnicity and religion.”

Further, courts should also refrain from resorting to unreasonable and undue delays, CEDAW said, noting that shortcomings in the Tanzanian judiciary had denied the women justice, with their appeal pending before the Court of Appeal for more than six years.

Among several other recommendations, CEDAW called on Tanzania to encourage dialogue on the removal of discriminatory law provisions and provide mandatory training for judicial personnel on the Convention and the Committee’s jurisprudence. CEDAW said Tanzania should submit a written response within six months, any action taken in light of its recommendations.

International Criminal Court welcomes Palestine as State Party to the Rome Statute

1 April - The International Criminal Court (ICC) welcomed the Palestine as the 123rd State Party to its founding Rome Statute today, in a ceremony held at the seat of the Court in The Hague in The Netherlands.

“Accession to a treaty is, of course, just the first step,” said Judge Kuniko Ozaki, the ICC’s Second Vice-President. “As the Rome Statute today enters into force for the State of Palestine, Palestine acquires all the rights as well as responsibilities that come with being a State Party to the Statute. These are substantive commitments, which cannot be taken lightly.”

During the ceremony, Ms. Ozaki presented Riad Al-Malki, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, with a special edition of the Rome Statute, as a symbol of their joint commitment to the rule of law.

Joining Ms. Ozaki and Mr. Al-Malki at the ceremony were several other ICC judges, as well as the ICC Deputy Prosecutor, James Stewart, ICC Registrar Herman von Hebel and the President of the Assembly of States Parties to the Statute, Sidiki Kaba.

“Such highly symbolic commitment confirms, once again, that people all over the world embrace the noble ideals of the ICC, that are ideals of peace and justice for all,” said Mr. Kaba.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Palestine Dr. Riad Al-Malki said the accession brought the world closer to its shared goals of justice and peace.

“As Palestine formally becomes a State Party to the Rome Statute today, the world is also a step closer to ending a long era of impunity and injustice,” he said.

Today’s step comes after the 16 January announcement by ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda that she had opened a preliminary examination into the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, following the accession earlier in January by



ICC Second Vice-President, Judge Kuniko Ozaki (right), walking with Foreign Minister Dr. Riad Al-Malki to a ceremony welcoming the State of Palestine as the 123rd State Party to the Rome Statute, the ICC’s founding treaty. Photo: ICC-CPI

the Palestinian Authority to the Court's founding Rome Statute.

A news release from the ICC noted that Ms. Bensouda opened an initial examination of the situation following the Palestinian Government accession to the Rome Statute on 2 January 2015 and its declaration of 1 January 2015, accepting the jurisdiction of the ICC 'over alleged crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, since June 13, 2014.'

UN agency launches project to boost agricultural production in northern Mali



A farmer, participating in an FAO project in Mali on sustainable intensification of agriculture, sorts niebe beans. Photo: FAO/Swiatoslaw Wojtkowiak

1 April - A new project aimed at restoring the livelihoods of some 33,000 households affected by armed conflict and climate change in northern Mali has been launched today by the country's Government and the United Nations agriculture agency.

"This work represents a contribution to Mali's peace process, because without security there cannot be food security and where there's food insecurity, conflicts often erupt," said the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), José Graziano da Silva, during an official visit to the country.

The implementation phase of the project has now begun, with the FAO and the Government working together to rehabilitate agricultural production for families in the Gao, Mopti and Timbuktu regions.

Activities will focus on helping 25,000 households to restart food and horticultural production and on providing 8,000 pastoralist families with feed and veterinary products for their cattle. Beneficiaries will also receive training in farming and nutritional good practices, with emphasis on the needs of women's groups engaged in horticulture.

The project is part of a larger \$100 million World Bank Economic Recovery and Reconstruction Programme in Mali and the FAO is implementing the agricultural component in the north of the country at the Government's request.

"The partnership between the World Bank and FAO is win-win, because it allows for FAO's technical know-how to be deployed to support the investments that Mali so very much needs," Graziano da Silva noted.

Agriculture in parts of Mali, particularly the north, has been seriously affected in recent years by civil strife and related impacts such as labour shortages due to population displacements, lack of agricultural support services and fragmentation of markets. Although last season's rains have been good, in recent years erratic weather, dry spells, and flooding have exacerbated these problems.

Across Mali, the FAO's \$15.4 million strategic response plan aims to improve living conditions of about 400,000 people facing food insecurity and to ensure a sustainable return of the displaced persons and refugees in the best possible conditions, while supporting host communities.

The agency's work in Mali is part of a broader United Nations Strategic Response Plan for the Sahel region which aims to build the resilience of rural livelihoods and local food and nutrition security systems. It is combining humanitarian assistance and development efforts to help countries deal with threats and disasters that affect agriculture, food security and nutrition in a proactive and efficient way, and this year, an appeal was launched for \$116 million to help support 5.4 million people in the region.