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Security Council urges Yemeni stakeholders to 'resume and accelerate' political dialogue



Wide view of the Security Council. UN Photo/Loey Felipe (file)

2 June - The Security Council today voiced deep concern about the "grave situation" in Yemen and urged the country's stakeholders to engage as soon as possible in United Nations-brokered inclusive political consultations.

In a statement released late this afternoon, the 15-member Council reaffirmed its call on Yemeni parties to attend the talks and engage "without preconditions and in good faith," including by resolving their differences through dialogue and consultations, rejecting acts of violence to achieve political goals, and refraining from provocation and all unilateral actions to undermine the political transition.

Expressing deep disappointment that the UN-backed consultations, previously scheduled to take place in Geneva on 28 May, did not take place, the Council also emphasized that the inclusive dialogue must be a Yemeni-led process and urged all parties "to resume and accelerate" them with the intention of brokering a "consensus-based political solution."

In addition, the statement noted that the Council members reiterated their full support for the efforts of the UN and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and further called on Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to "intensify" his good offices role in order to enable a resumption of "a peaceful, inclusive, orderly and Yemeni-led political transition."

The ongoing political and security tensions have further aggravated Yemen's humanitarian crisis and food shortages with currently 12.5 million food insecure people in the country – some 2 million more than when the fighting began. The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) is aiming to provide emergency food assistance to 2.5 million people, and, from August, it plans to increase that number, reaching 12 million people by the end of the year.



To that point, the Security Council endorsed the Secretary-General's call for "a further humanitarian pause" in order to allow assistance "to reach the Yemeni people urgently" and called upon all sides to comply with international humanitarian law.

Finally, the UN body stressed the urgent need for ongoing commercial supplies to enter the country because of its "heavy dependence" on imported food and fuel.

As a result of shortages, food prices have skyrocketed and the cost of cooking gas has risen on average 131 per cent since the start of the crisis, according to WFP data.

Yemen, the poorest country in the region, also imports almost 90 per cent of its food from abroad.

Burundi: UN urges return to political dialogue amid ongoing tensions, humanitarian crisis

2 June - The United Nations is continuing its efforts to facilitate a dialogue among Burundian stakeholders amid the country's ongoing political deadlock and a burgeoning humanitarian crisis, a spokesperson for the Organization announced today.

Briefing a press conference earlier this afternoon, UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told reporters that the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, Said Djinnit, had returned to the Burundian capital, Bujumbura, after attending the East African Community Summit on Sunday. Mr. Djinnit's return comes as the UN official seeks to reboot talks with Burundian stakeholders on ways to resume the consultative political dialogue.



Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, Said Djinnit speaks to the press in Bujumbura, Burundi on 29 May 2015. Photo: UN Electoral Observation Mission in Burundi (MENUB)

Burundi has been embroiled in a political crisis since mid-April when popular protests erupted after the country's ruling National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party nominated President Pierre Nkurunziza as its presidential candidate for a third term.

The situation escalated shortly thereafter, on 13 May, following an attempted coup d'état as President Nkurunziza left for the Summit of the East African Community, which was intended to try to resolve the crisis.

Mr. Dujarric today reported that Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, had also recently met with the First Vice-President of Burundi, Prosper Bazombanza, and endorsed the recommendations of the East African Summit which, he said, provided the Government with an additional opportunity to create the conditions for peaceful and credible elections.

Moreover, Mr. Feltman had encouraged the Burundian Government to seize the opportunity to take concrete steps to ensure the security of the electoral process and of political and civil society actors, the disarmament of armed civilians, the strengthening of the national independent electoral commission (CENI), and the vote of refugees, Mr. Dujarric added.

The crisis in Burundi has not only led to growing tensions within the country but has also spawned a troubling humanitarian crisis across the region as thousands of Burundian refugees stream across the country's borders and into neighbouring states such as Rwanda, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Since early April, nearly 100,000 Burundians have fled their country, according to UN estimates. At the same time, a cholera epidemic striking refugees gathered along the shores of Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania has only added to the miseries of the unfolding humanitarian crisis.

The UN Spokesperson, meanwhile, reiterated the Organization's concern about the possibility of an escalation of violence throughout Burundi and reiterated the UN's calls for calm and restraint while urging Burundians to express their views peacefully.

In addition, Mr. Dujarric noted that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had spoken to Presidents Kikwete of Tanzania and dos Santos of Angola by phone yesterday to express appreciation for their leadership in helping address the Burundian crisis.

The Secretary-General reportedly discussed how best the UN, the East African Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region could help defuse tensions and support the holding of peaceful and credible elections in Burundi.

Ban to convene international Ebola recovery conference in New York

2 June - To help mobilize needed resources “in the last mile of the response” against the Ebola outbreak and to start the affected West African countries on the path of early recovery, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today announced that he will convene an international conference next month.

“All of your investments, all of the sacrifices and lives lost, and all of the risks that the relief workers took would be squandered if the outbreak recurs,” Mr. Ban cautioned in his remarks to an informal plenary of the UN General Assembly on the Organization’s Ebola response efforts.

“Next month, on July 10th, I will convene an international Ebola recovery conference” in New York, the UN chief said. “It will address these issues and help mobilize the resources needed to start early recovery” from the epidemic that has affected more than 27,000 people, killing over 11,000 mostly, in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

“My appeal to you is clear: we are in the last mile of the response, but the job is not done,” the UN chief said. “We need you to persist in supporting the region in getting to a resilient zero cases and then beginning to recover.”

Also speaking at the meeting, the UN Special Envoy on Ebola, Dr. David Nabarro, noted “vast areas within each country have been free of Ebola for many weeks” and that the “green shoots of safe and early recovery have been planted and will contribute to the tapestry of trust and confidence so needed by societies.”

But also, warning against complacency, Dr. Nabarro said the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates a 50 per cent chance that the disease will recur and need to be controlled in the coming 12 months.

“The challenge facing us all is not only to end the Ebola outbreak but to ensure a healthier and safer future for all the world’s people,” he said. “We still have so much to do.”

He also said that next month’s planned Ebola recovery conference will be followed by the African Union’s efforts to galvanize African people, their governments and their business leaders in solidarity with the affected communities and countries at a 20 July conference in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea.

Peter Graaff, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), gave a briefing to the Member States, saying that experience in Liberia, which was declared free of Ebola transmission on 9 May, “demonstrates last mile of response is hardest.”

In preparation for the rainy season, Mr. Graaff said, UNMEER has reinforced capacities in Guinea and Sierra Leone, the World Food Programme has prepositioned supplies and WHO is strengthening national capacities including those in unaffected areas.

Noting that “when local communities are engaged, we see dramatic improvement,” he also spoke of the need to step up efforts to devise new ways to earn the trust of some of the communities resisting outside assistance in their Ebola response.



In Sierra Leone, local health workers plan for the day ahead, as they continue their vigilance against Ebola. Photo: WHO/S. Aranda

New humanitarian appeal for Iraq vital to meet rising health needs among displaced – UN



Seven-year-old Safa guards her family's World Food Programme boxes by sitting on top of them, in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq. Photo: OCHA/Jason Athanasiadis

2 June - If the upcoming launch of the 2015 humanitarian response plan for Iraq by the United Nations and partners fails to raise the required \$500 million, the people of the country, especially those internally displaced by fighting, will face even greater hardship, a World Health Organization (WHO) official warned today.

“There are three strategic aims for health assistance: ensuring that both preventive and curative health services are available to all IDPs (internally displaced persons); maintaining the supply chain of essential and life-saving medicine to all health outlets; and ensuring effective preventive measures,” explained Dr. Jaffar Hussain, head of WHO operations in Iraq, during a press briefing in Geneva.

Of the total \$500 million that will be requested to cover humanitarian needs in Iraq through the end of the year, health partners will ask for \$60 million, which includes \$22.5 million for WHO assistance only, he added. The Plan will be launched on June 4 in Brussels.

“The scale and scope of conflict in Iraq has expanded and the situation is very challenging due to massive displacement since June 2014 and its effect on the host community,” he said.

Initially confined to the north of the country, the displacement has now worsened, with between 2.1 and 2.3 million IDPs moving quickly in the last two weeks in the central and southern parts of Iraq, due to attacks on Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) insurgents.

“The public health challenges faced by displaced persons are enormous”, Dr. Hussain underlined. According to WHO, 85 to 90 per cent of these populations are living outside of the IDPs camps in very unfavorable dwellings, “wherever they could find shelter.”

This situation has exacerbated the vulnerability of the IDPs to communicable diseases, particularly measles, hepatitis and other water-borne diseases, which makes it a priority to adopt preventive measures such as disease early-warning systems, immunization campaigns, health promotion and education, care of patients and support to hospitals, the official recommended.

“With the arrival of summer and temperatures above 50 degrees Celsius in the southern and central parts of Iraq, WHO is very concerned about the risks faced by IDP populations and their extreme vulnerability to outbreaks, including cholera and hepatitis,” Dr. Hussain pointed out, recalling that his organization is already treating numerous patients with chronic diseases without the necessary infrastructures and health personnel. Most of them fled the insurgents.

A number of grants have allowed WHO so far to provide prefab and mobile health clinics on the ground, as well as a strong supply chain of vital medicine and items to all IDP locations. However, that money will run out by the end of June, the WHO representative underscored, a situation that makes the success of the Humanitarian Response Plan of a tremendous importance for the well-being of the Iraqi people.

After 65 years, UN agency remains 'vital stabilizing factor' for Palestine refugees in Middle East – Ban



Children queue up at the UNRWA medical point in Yalda. Photo: UNRWA

2 June - Marking 65 years since the inception of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called it more than just an agency but a “lifeline,” as he paid tribute to its staff especially those who have lost their lives trying to serve others.

“Anniversaries are usually a time for celebration,” Mr. Ban said at Headquarters this morning. “But we do so with the heaviest of hearts. We do so knowing that we should not have had to mark the 65th anniversary of UNRWA because UNRWA was never meant to exist for this long.”

“It exists because of political failure. [It exists] in the absence of a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestine refugees,” the UN chief added.

UNRWA provides assistance and protection to nearly 5.2 million registered Palestine refugees through the provision of health care, education, social services, infrastructure and camp improvement, and microfinance, and emergency assistance, including in times of armed conflict.

Joining Mr. Ban at today’s event on *UNRWA@65: Sustaining Human Development and Protecting Rights of Palestine Refugees* was President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, Special Representative of the President of the State of Palestine, Hanan Ashrawi, and the Commissioner-General of the UNRWA, Pierre Krähenbühl.

The Secretary-General paid tribute to UNRWA’s 30,000 dedicated staff, most of them Palestine refugees themselves, and to all the staff who were killed during the terrible fighting last summer.

Last summer’s conflict in Gaza caused massive loss of life and devastated homes, schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure, Mr. Ban said, as he urged parties to finalize the arrangements to rebuild destroyed homes.

“We know where failure to address these and other issues will lead. We have seen it time and again. Gaza is a powder keg – mounting frustration and anger will surely light the fuse. Action is needed now,” Mr. Ban said.

Gaza today is home of the highest unemployment in the world, with more than 60 per cent of young people not working. Life opportunities for Palestine refugees continue to be made immeasurably more difficult by blockade, bombings, siege, closures and upheaval, he added.

Some 60,000 Palestine refugees from Syria have fled to Lebanon and Jordan, putting pressure on host communities. From Syria’s Yarmouk and Jordan’s camps to the West Bank, the lives of Palestine refugees are constrained, with poverty and deprivation overflowing in overcrowded camps and the needs of the communities continuing to grow resources.

“The result is deepening pain and vulnerability for Palestine refugees. Some are resorting to desperate measures, putting their lives in the hands of unscrupulous human traffickers, in a perilous attempt to reach Europe by sea,” Mr. Ban said.

UNRWA remains a vital stabilizing factor, Mr. Ban said, urging the leaders of Israel, Palestine and all parties with influence to resume meaningful negotiations without further delay, and put an end to unilateral actions that erode trust.

In the same vein, General Assembly President Kutesa said that few could have imagined 65 years later, that UNRWA would continue to play such a vital role in the lives of millions of Palestinians.

“Last year’s conflict in Gaza has had far-reaching, negative impacts on the 1.2 million people UNRWA provides assistance

to there. Thousands died and many more were injured, some of whom will suffer from life-long physical disabilities and emotional trauma,” he said.

Moreover, the deterioration of the socio-economic and humanitarian conditions in the region has created formidable obstacles to the agency’s ability to provide necessary aid, including with its emergency, reconstruction and development programmes.

Hence, it is vital that the necessary funding is provided as quickly as possible so that reconstruction can begin in Gaza. In that context, he urged all donors to seek ways to further support UNRWA’s vital work across the region.

“Renewed support from the UN system, donors and the international community will be critical to further strengthening the work of the Agency,” Mr. Kutesa emphasized.

Also taking to the floor today, the head of UNRWA, Mr. Krähenbühl, said that marking 65 years of the agency requires a necessary moment of reflection on what it means to be Palestine refugees today, who face an “existential crisis.”

“Being a Palestinian refugee in Gaza means being a victim of a blockade and wishing nothing more than to be self-sufficient,” he said, recalling also his visit to Syria’s Yarmouk camp where he had seen first-hand the misery and hunger etched into the faces of Palestine refugees.

Reflecting also means reviewing some of the outstanding achievements UNRWA has made in the last six and a half decades. For example, during the 2014 conflict in Gaza UNRWA sheltered some 300,000 displaced persons in 90 of its schools and provided lifesaving aid in the extreme circumstances of war.

“During the ongoing conflict in Syria, we continue to provide essential relief to the hundreds of thousands displaced from Yarmouk with essential lifesaving aid but also healthcare and education,” Mr. Krähenbühl said.

With the support of its partners, UNRWA has also contributed to human capital development of the Middle East. As it stands now, some 700 schools are run by UNRWA, which is equivalent to running the public school system of San Francisco. Some 140 health care clinics are also run by UNRWA.

This has created the human capital that many countries in the world would envy. Pointing out that these achievements come at a high cost, he paid tribute to the UNRWA workers who lost their lives in 2014.

“We are all witnesses to the failure to find a just and lasting solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees, which has become a matter of common sense in an increasingly unstable Middle East,” he said.

Not acting today when 65 per cent of Palestinian refugees under the age of 25 are educated but unemployed will lead many to despair and to choose desperate routes in the Middle East and beyond, he warned.

“We can choose to close our eyes to this but we should be aware of what the landscape will look like when we open them again,” Mr. Krähenbühl said, emphasizing that the agency requires the support of existing and new partners and that financing its work must be seen as an investment rather than a burden.

“But humanitarian aid is not a substitute for human dignity and human rights. Palestinians deserve a just and lasting solution,” he added.

Cost of child maltreatment in Asia-Pacific tops \$200 billion annually, reports UNICEF



Sixteen-year-old Natasha Boropi speaks about the effects of polygamous marriage and alcohol abuse on children at the launch of UNICEF's 'End Violence against Children' campaign in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea in June 2014. Photo: UNICEF Papua New Guinea/James Alcock

2 June - Child abuse and violence is costing countries in East Asia and the Pacific around \$209 billion a year, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) announced today in the first costing of child maltreatment in the region, revealing that "inaction about violence results in serious economic costs to countries and communities."

"According to the study, the costs associated with emotional abuse are \$65.9 billion, those associated with physical abuse are \$39.6 billion, sexual abuse costs about \$39.9 billion, neglect costs \$32.4 billion, witnessing domestic violence costs \$31 billion and death from maltreatment costs an estimated \$500 million," UNICEF said in a press release issued today on the study.

Among others, the study also found that: in lower middle income countries, 35 per cent of males have experienced physical abuse and 22 per cent of females have experienced sexual abuse; in high income countries, 42 per cent of females have experienced emotional abuse and 32 per cent of males have witnessed domestic violence; 25 per cent of mental disorders among males in low income countries are attributable to physical abuse during childhood; and 31 per cent of mental disorders among females in lower middle income countries are attributable to sexual abuse during childhood.

It also found that the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) lost due to child maltreatment is highest in upper middle income countries, at 3.45 per cent with the largest part (1.26 per cent) due to emotional abuse.

Additional research in Cambodia found that over 50 percent of children had experienced at least one form of violence before the age of 18, UNICEF said, noting that roughly a quarter of Cambodian children were emotionally abused and about five per cent experienced some form of sexual abuse.

"We all know that violence against children must stop because it is morally wrong. This research shows that inaction about violence results in serious economic costs to countries and communities," said UNICEF Regional Director Daniel Toole said. "Governments need to take urgent action to address violence against children, both for the sake of the children themselves and for the wellbeing of future generations."

UNICEF said the impact of child maltreatment include an added burden on already stretched health care systems, disability and death, and increased levels of violence and criminality.

"It is difficult for children who experience violence and abuse to grow up to be productive members of society, and their countries also risk losing the potential benefits to their communities these children might otherwise provide," it said.

UNICEF is working with governments in the region to take action based on these findings, noting that all governments in the region have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which commits them to protect children from violence, abuse and maltreatment.

"All children have the right to live free from violence, which harms their physical and mental growth, and inhibits the growth of their society and economies," emphasized Mr. Toole. "Violence against children often takes place behind closed doors but it is preventable when people come together and say loudly and clearly that this is not acceptable."

South Sudan fighting triggers new mass displacement, warns UN refugee agency



South Sudanese refugees wait to be registered at a crossing into Ethiopia earlier in 2015. Photo: UNHCR/R. Riek

2 June - Heavy fighting in South Sudan's Unity and Upper Nile states over the last two months has displaced more than 100,000 people and blocked humanitarian aid deliveries for some 650,000 people as aid organizations have been forced to withdraw, a representative for the United Nations refugee agency has confirmed today.

"Refugees cite the upsurge in fighting, but also growing food insecurity as the main reasons for fleeing their homes," Adrian Edwards, spokesperson for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) told reporters in Geneva.

Since the beginning of the year, some 60,000 South Sudanese have fled the country, mostly to Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda bringing the total number of people who fled the country since December 2013 to 555,000. Some 1.5 million are internally displaced in the country and more than 3.8 million – a third of the country's population of 11 million – do not have sufficient food.

As fighting continues, UNHCR offices in Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda have all reported sharp increases in arrivals during May. Last week alone, some 6,000 South Sudanese arrived in Sudan's White Nile and South Kordofan states.

"Our office in Uganda also reported an increase in arrivals over the last month of some 4,000 refugees. Many of the arriving refugees said they fled the fighting in and around the town of Malakal, but also growing food insecurity and rising prices for commodities," Mr. Edwards said.

Given the worsening security and humanitarian situation on the South Sudanese side of the border, UNHCR and its partners are preparing for the refugee influx to grow.

"The upcoming rainy season requires that we pre-position relief items as many of the areas where refugees are located can become inaccessible," Mr. Edwards explained.

To enable continuing humanitarian assistance, UNHCR is constructing a jetty on the White Nile River and building roads to refugee sites. Water and sanitation conditions at many of these sites need to be improved rapidly. UNHCR and its partners are developing new sites to help accommodate new arrivals and a contingency plan for future arrivals.

However, with the number of South Sudanese fleeing their country increasing rapidly, Mr. Edwards expressed concern that the 2015 South Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan is only funded at 10 per cent.

"This leaves many lifesaving activities such as the provision of clean water, sanitation and health services, food and shelter severely underfunded," he explained.

Afghanistan: outgoing rights official at UN mission pledges commitment to advancing women's rights

2 June - While the outgoing senior United Nations rights official in Afghanistan said she expected the human rights advances made “will be sustained, will not be rolled back, and will not be sacrificed,” she lamented the high level of violence against women and the need for the Government to do “much more” for women's rights.

Georgette Gagnon, Human Rights Director of the UN Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), also said in an interview released today, that while UNAMA's work did result in government and international forces adopting procedures to limit their actions' impact on civilians, the figures of civilians killed or injured is higher in 2015 than at any previous recorded stage in the conflict.



UNAMA Director of Human Rights
Georgette Gagnon. Photo: Fardin
Waezi/UNAMA

Speaking after completing more than five years as senior UN human rights official in Afghanistan, she said “civil society in Afghanistan is vibrant; it is very human-rights based and human-rights friendly, and it is taking forward the human rights struggle here.”

“That, of course, is very encouraging,” Ms. Gannon said.

But Ms. Gagnon referred to the case of Farkhunda, the Afghan woman who was brutally murdered by a Kabul mob on 19 March and whose death prompted calls within and outside Afghanistan for authorities to protect women's rights.

“Many women's groups and others went on the street to demonstrate for proper, prompt justice,” she said. “Unfortunately, there has not been proper, prompt justice.”

“There still are many serious issues with women's rights,” she said. “The level of violence against women is still high; the government does need to do much more to address it.”

In the interview, Ms. Gagnon said highlighted positive and encouraging indicators against a backdrop of enormous challenges posed by conflict, as well as by the complex political and economic situation.

“We're expecting that the gains made will be sustained, will not be rolled back, and will not be sacrificed,” she said.

She noted that civil society groups, in particular, are advancing the human rights struggle in Afghanistan.

Ms. Gagnon also spoke about critical issues for Afghanistan, such as civilian protection during armed conflict, children in conflict, women's issues, detention practices and peace and reconciliation initiatives.

On protection of civilians, she said that, during the last five years, UNAMA had dedicated resources to meticulously documenting the impact of the conflict on civilians across the country to get the parties to the conflict to take concrete steps to mitigate the effects on civilians – to protect lives.

Ms. Gagnon described how the United Nations continues working with all parties to abide with their national and international obligations to protect civilians.

“We're bringing forward our findings, our documentation, our reporting, and we're urging and putting forward recommendations, practical ways and means to reduce civilian casualties,” she said. “We have regular dialogue in the field with the military actors, urging them to abide by their obligations to protect civilians – ensure they have directives in place, rules of procedure, rules of engagement that put the protection of civilians at the centre.”

Appealing for funds, UN agency aims to reach 2.5 million in Yemen with food aid by July

2 June - Amid a worsening crisis and growing number of hungry people in Yemen, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced today that it is scaling-up its operations to get emergency food aid to 2.5 million people by July.

“The conflict has increased the number of hungry people in the country,” WFP spokesperson Elisabeth Byrs told a press briefing in Geneva today.

During the next three months, WFP will need around \$43 million every month for the emergency distribution of full rations to some 2.5 million people, she added.

There are currently 12.5 million food insecure people in Yemen, some 2 million more than when the crisis began. Until July, WFP will aim to provide emergency food assistance to 2.5 million people, and, from August, it plans to increase that number, reaching 12 million people by the end of the year.

So far, WFP has reached some 1.6 million people with nearly 20,000 metric tonnes of food and ships continue to arrive. The WFP-chartered Amsterdam ship set for Yemen anchored at the country’s Hudaydah port in on yesterday, carrying some 5,700 metric tons of white flour, yellow split peas and vegetable oil. That is enough to feed around 60,000 Yemenis for a month.

Another WFP-chartered ship, *MV Celine*, carrying 7,000 tonnes of wheat flour is expected to berth in Hudaydah in the next few days. The *MV Copenhagen*, transporting 1.5 million litres of fuel for partners, will depart Dubai for Hudaydah on Thursday, 4 June.

“A key problem is that prices continue to increase for all food commodities, limiting the functioning of food markets,” Mr. Byrs told reporters.

WFP Yemen’s weekly market monitoring report, covering the third week of May, found that food has largely disappeared from the shelves in several governorates, including in Abyan, Al Dhale’e, Aden, Lahj, Sa’ada and Shabwah.

“Food in those places is either sporadically available or completely unavailable,” she said.

Moreover, food prices have skyrocketed. The price of wheat flour has risen on average 43 per cent, with the highest rise recorded in Marib governorate at 115 per cent since the start of the crisis.

The cost of cooking gas has risen on average 131 per cent since the start of the crisis. And there is also a severe shortage in clean water, power and fuel supplies.

Yemen, the poorest country in the region, imports almost 90 per cent of its food from abroad.



Women in war-torn Yemen are using bicycles to find food and medicine for their families. Photo: UNDP Yemen/Bushra al-Fusail

UN expert urges Somalia to guarantee free expression and to suspend death penalty

2 June - Somalia must put in place a legal framework that guarantees freedom of expression in the country, as well as a moratorium on capital punishment, a United Nations independent expert recommended today, while commending progress accomplished so far.

“Somali journalists are often harassed, arrested, censored, even imprisoned, and media organizations are closed down,” underlined Bahame Tom Mukiryia Nyanduga, who is the United Nations Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the troubled Horn of Africa country, where he just completed his second mission on 29 May.

“Such incidents risk having a chilling effect on this basic right, particularly essential at a time when Somalia moves towards finalising its State-building process,” the expert noted, calling on the Federal Government to put in place a legal framework that guarantees the freedom of the media, to practise their profession free of intimidation, harassment and imprisonment.

Mr. Bahame Nyanduga also expressed concern at the continued application of the death penalty throughout Somalia, despite the commitment to adopt a moratorium on capital punishment made by the Government to the UN Human Rights Council during its 2011 Universal Periodic Review of the situation in the country.

“I encourage the Somali authorities to put in place that moratorium,” he stressed.

During his eight-day mission, which began on 22 May, the expert equally drew attention to the apparent weakness in security and justice institutions, particularly the failure by the police to provide adequate security for the civilian population, including in camps for internally displaced people.

In response, the Government explained its efforts to increase police recruitment, particularly of female police officers and to enhance their technical capacities. Officials also outlined the efforts undertaken to provide protection to victims of rape and gender-based violence and to encourage victims to use the formal justice system rather than the traditional justice system.

According to the Independent Expert, the Federal Government and the regional authorities to engage in dialogue with traditional and religious leaders in the lead-up to the constitutional referendum and elections in 2016 to encourage inclusive participation of women, minorities and persons with disabilities in the political process.

Next year, Somalia’s human rights record will be reviewed by other UN Member States through the Universal Periodic Review process. This September, Mr. Bahame Nyanduga will submit a comprehensive report with recommendations to the Human Rights Council aimed at assisting the government to fulfil its obligations.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based 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.



Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Somalia Bahame Tom Mukiryia Nyanduga. UN Photo/Ilyas Ahmed

UN expert calls on Azerbaijan to free human rights defenders ahead of 2015 Baku Games



Independent Expert on Human Rights
Michel Forst. Photo: Jean-Marc Ferré

2 June - United Nations Special Rapporteur Michel Forst today criticized the “relentless prosecution and repression of prominent rights activists in Azerbaijan” and called for their immediate release – before the inaugural European Games begin in Baku on 12 June.

The independent expert said, “As preparations are in full swing for the Baku Games, the Azerbaijani authorities stepped up their efforts to harass, jail, and surveil human rights defenders, as well as ban them from travel and freeze their assets.”

Mr. Forst underscored that such “unjustifiable criminalization” was usually justified with trumped-up or politically-motivated charges of State treason, illegal entrepreneurship, tax evasion and abuse of office. “As a result, most Azerbaijani defenders have had to endure prolonged pre-trial detention, imprisonment or exile,” he explained.

The UN expert also drew attention to actions against Intigam Aliyev and Khadija Ismail for documenting cases of political prisoners; Anar Mammadli, Bashir Suleymanli and Elnur Mammadov for monitoring presidential elections in October 2013; Leyla Yunus and her husband, Arif, for criticizing the Government; and Rasul Jafarov for organizing a “Sport for Rights” initiative during the Baku Games that aimed to expose corruption and rights abuses in the country.

Mr. Forst expressed his deep regret for continued efforts “to stifle fundamental freedoms of expression and association, and to shrink the democratic space even further in the country” and urged the Government to allow those who promote and protect human rights to do so “in an environment that empowers rather than prosecutes.”

The human rights expert noted that the first European Olympic Games represented “an opportunity for the countries of Europe to come together and celebrate the Olympic spirit of freedom and inclusiveness.”

He stressed that as host country, Azerbaijan should embody those ideals and release the imprisoned human rights supporters. “Azerbaijani activists must be free and they deserve to be part of the European celebrations in Baku.”

Mr. Forst also urged athletes, sport fans and supporters of the Games “to show solidarity with Azerbaijani human rights defenders and join the calls for them to be freed immediately in the European spirit of freedom and human rights.”

Maina Kiai, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and David Kaye, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression also endorsed Mr. Forst’s appeal to the Azerbaijani Government.

Ban saddened by passenger ship accident in China

2 June - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today expressed his sadness over a ship accident that occurred last night in China, reportedly resulting in major casualties.

“The Secretary-General is deeply saddened to learn of the major loss of life as a result of a passenger ship accident on the Yangtze River in China”, reads the statement made available by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.

According to media reports, 458 people were aboard the *Eastern Star*, a chartered cruise ship, when it was struck by a violent rainstorm.



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas (file)

“The Secretary-General extends his condolences to the families of the victims and also sends his deep sympathies to the Government and people of China. He fervently hopes more survivors will be found”, added the statement.

UN expert urges Greece and global financial institutions to reach debt deal that respects human rights



Credit: OHCHR

2 June - Noting that challenges remain to curb Greek debt crisis while addressing human rights, a United Nations expert today urged international institutions and Greece to redouble their efforts to “maximum available resources” for financial obligations and ensure the enjoyment of human rights.

“If there is no compromise, Greece may sooner or later default, making the crisis...even worse,” Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, the UN Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights, stressed in a press statement today.

The Greek Government has carried out stringent policies since 2010, in which public spending cuts and labour market reforms accelerated unemployment. The latest data show one out of two young adults is jobless. Moreover, 35.7 per cent of the population is at risk of poverty and social exclusion, the highest percentage in the Eurozone.

Healthcare and education are also great concerns, with severe impact on the most vulnerable, said Mr. Bohoslavsky, spotlighting the human rights issues identified in his predecessor’s report on the subject.

While welcoming actions made by Greece such as a debt audit commission and a law on relief for people living in extreme poverty, Mr. Bohoslavsky said these initiatives do not “go far enough,” warning that “economic and social right could be further undermined in Greece by lack of flexibility.”

Greek Government and international lenders should consider a holistic approach to tackle economic and social rights issues, recommended the UN expert, with a priority in maximizing available resources to “bolster the real economy and close holes in the social security.”

Achieving adjustment also needs shared efforts in a fair manner compliant with the obligations Greece and creditor States under related international law, according to Mr. Bohoslavsky.

Of great significance is reforming tax measures and combatting tax evasion at the national level, he highlighted.

At the regional level, the human rights expert suggested a further debt relief for “sustainable debt solutions.”

“Human rights should not stop at the doors of international organizations and international financial institutions,” said Mr. Bohoslavsky, underscoring that “they have to be respected when responsibilities are delegated by States to international

bodies, such as the European Stability Mechanism.”

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based 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.