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Security Council approves probe into those responsible for using chemical weapons in Syria

7 August - The United Nations Security Council today gave the greenlight for the establishment of a Joint Investigative Mechanism to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

In a unanimously adopted resolution, the 15-member body requested the UN Secretary-General, in coordination with the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), to submit recommendations for the establishment of the Mechanism within 20 days. The Council will then respond to the recommendations within five days of receipt.

The Mechanism, established for a period of one year with a possibility of future extension, will be tasked with identifying "individuals, entities, groups, or governments involved in the use of chemicals as weapons, including chlorine or any other toxic chemical," in Syria, according to the Council, which reiterated that those responsible must be held accountable.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the adoption of the resolution, noting that holding the perpetrators of the toxic chemical attacks accountable may hopefully alleviate the prolonged suffering of the Syrian people.

"He is pleased that the Security Council has decided to act and take the necessary action not just to halt the continued use of toxic chemicals as weapons by any party to the conflict, but also to send a strong collective message that any such use will not be tolerated," said the statement.

The resolution stresses the obligation of the Syrian Government and all parties in the country to "cooperate fully" with the



The US Vessel Cape Ray, on which all 581 metric tonnes of a precursor chemical for sarin gas were removed from Syria and safely destroyed as the ship sailed in international waters in 2014. Photo: US Dept. of Transportation



OPCW and the UN, including providing full access to all locations, individuals and materials in Syria relevant for the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

It also calls on all other States to cooperate fully, including providing any relevant information they may possess pertaining to those involved in use of chemicals as weapons in Syria.

In March 2015, the Council expressed deep concern that toxic chemicals, such as chlorine, had been used as a weapon in Syria – which was the conclusion with a “high degree of confidence” by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission – stressing that those who use such weapons must be held accountable.

The UN and the OPCW previously worked together to oversee the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles and production facilities, a task they completed in October 2014.

With ‘long-awaited’ elections set to begin in Haiti, Ban urges peaceful campaigning



Ballots to be used in the 9 August 2015 vote in Haiti to elect 118 Deputies and two thirds of the Senate arrive in the capital Port-au-Prince from Dubai. Photo: UN/MINUSTAH /Prasad Ranganath

7 August - Welcoming the upcoming presidential, legislative and local elections in Haiti, which will begin on Sunday, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today stressed the need to ensure credible and peaceful polls.

“These long-awaited elections constitute a major milestone for democracy in Haiti,” Mr. Ban said in a statement issued by his spokesperson.

“The Secretary-General, in particular, welcomes the increased ownership of the process by the Haitian people. Credible, inclusive and transparent elections are a key to long-term stability and promotion of a vibrant democracy.”

Mr. Ban urged the political parties, candidates and their supporters to campaign peacefully and to resolve any disputes that may arise through dialogue and established legal procedures.

Inviting all Haitians to participate and exercise their democratic right to vote for the renewal of their institutions of governance, the Secretary-General added that the UN stands “side by side” with the Haitian people and will continue to extend its full support to this important process.

The elections kick off on Sunday with the first round of legislative polls. The presidential polls are expected to follow in October.

UN urges bold action to tackle deepening refugee crisis in Greece

7 August - The United Nations today called for bold and urgent action to address a deepening crisis in Greece, where some 124,000 refugees and migrants have arrived by sea this year – a staggering increase of over 750 per cent compared to the same period in 2014.

“This humanitarian emergency is happening in Europe, and requires an urgent Greek and European response,” the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a news release.

The arrivals are mainly in the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Kos, Samos, and Leros, according to the agency. In July alone, 50,000 new arrivals have been reported – 20,000 more than the previous month.



A group of Syrian refugees arrive on the island of Lesbos after travelling in an inflatable raft from Turkey, near Skala Sykaminias, Greece. Photo: UNHCR/A. McConnell

The vast majority of those coming to Greece are from countries experiencing conflict or human rights violations, mainly

Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, according to UNHCR.

Many are in need of urgent medical assistance, water, food, shelter and information, the agency added. The reception infrastructure, services and registration procedures are falling far short of real needs.

“Such a level of suffering should and can be avoided,” said Vincent Cochetel, UNHCR’s Director of the Bureau for Europe, who last week visited Greece with the Director of Emergency, Security and Supply to assess the refugee crisis.

“The Greek authorities need to urgently designate a single body to coordinate response and set up an adequate humanitarian assistance mechanism. As Greece faces financial challenges the country needs help, European countries should support Greece on these efforts.”

UNHCR is contributing to the various efforts to address the situation, including through the provision of interpretation services, legal information and basic emergency assistance. It is also providing, with the assistance of a Greek non-governmental organization, escorts for the transfer of unaccompanied children from the islands to specialized facilities on the mainland.

“Greece and Europe need to lead the response to this crisis, which can be resolved only through more solidarity within and outside the EU and increased alternative means to reach Europe for refugees fleeing from violence,” said Mr. Cochetel.

So far in 2015, over 225,000 refugees and migrants have arrived by sea in the Mediterranean and around 2,100 are estimated to have died or gone missing while trying to reach Europe – not including the incident that took place earlier this week when an overcrowded fishing boat sank off the coast of Libya.

Deploring latest Afghan attack, UN calls for perpetrators to be held accountable



An aerial view of Kabul, Afghanistan.
Photo: UNAMA/Ari Gaitanis

7 August - The top United Nations envoy in Afghanistan has condemned the killing of at least eight civilians and the injuring of more than 200 in an attack that took place in Kabul today.

A truck heavily packed with explosive materials detonated in the Shah Shahid area of the capital in the middle of the night when people were home sleeping, according to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Among those killed and injured were women and children.

Nicholas Haysom, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, reiterated the world body’s repeated calls for the immediate ban of weapons which kill and maim indiscriminately, and to cease attacks in civilian-populated areas.

“Those responsible for such attacks must be held accountable,” he said in a press statement.

“UNAMA extends its condolences to the families of all of those killed in the explosion and wishes a speedy recovery to those who were injured.”

In its latest report on civilian casualties, which was issued on Wednesday, the UN documented 4,921 civilian casualties (1,592 deaths and 3,329 injured) in the first half of 2015, a one per cent increase in total civilian casualties compared to the same period in 2014.

The vast majority – or 90 per cent – of civilian casualties resulted from ground engagements, improvised explosive devices, complex and suicide attacks and targeted killings, according to the 2015 Mid-year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, produced by UNAMA and the UN human rights office (OHCHR).

Extremists must not be allowed to escalate Israeli-Palestinian tensions, warns Ban

7 August - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today spoke out against recent violence between Israelis and Palestinians and called on leaders on both sides not to allow extremists to escalate the situation and “take control of the political agenda.”

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban condemned the numerous rockets launched from Gaza towards Israel over the last few days. He also voiced concern over recent violence in the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

The violence includes yesterday’s car ramming near the settlement of Shiloh which resulted in serious injuries to two Israeli soldiers; the firebomb attack that seriously injured an Israeli woman on Monday in East Jerusalem; and the violent clashes in the aftermath of the Duma terrorist attack.

Also, Mr. Ban received “worrisome” reports today of provocations by settlers in Hebron, the statement noted.

“The Secretary-General condemns these acts and expects all parties to speak out against and prevent such incidents. He calls upon Israeli and Palestinian political and community leaders not to allow extremists to escalate the situation and take control of the political agenda.”



The West Bank barrier, along with checkpoints, roadblocks and permit system, has created a closure regime that has had a dire effect on all aspects of life for Palestine refugees. Photo: UNRWA/Isabel de la Cruz

Myanmar: UN allocates \$9 million to rapidly scale up urgent flood relief



Cyclone Komen swept across western Myanmar causing widespread flooding and destruction as seen here in Kale Township in the Sagaing Region of the country. Photo: Khin Khin Aung/WFP

7 August - The top United Nations humanitarian official today allocated \$9 million to help aid organizations rapidly scale up assistance in Myanmar in the wake of major flooding and monsoon rains that affected over 330,000 people and killed at least 88.

“These funds will help provide people with emergency shelter, safe water supply, sanitation, food, critical health care and other services, at a time when they are in desperate need,” Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien said in a press release.

“However, additional funding sources continue to be urgently needed as aid operations in Myanmar remain critically underfunded,” he added.

The money released from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) will enable aid organizations to rapidly scale up their response and provide life-saving assistance to some 160,000 people in Rakhine and Chin states, and in the Sagaing and Magway regions.

Aid agencies estimate that at least \$47 million is required for the emergency response, but the number of affected people and the needs are expected to rise as the situation evolves.

This funding requirement for the floods response is in addition to the \$190 million Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan for this year, which has been 39 per cent funded so far.

The UN and its partners have been stepping up their support to the response being led by the Myanmar authorities, civil society groups, local organizations, and the Myanmar Red Cross Society. As of today, more than 387 metric tonnes of food for 103,000 people and 620,000 water treatment tablets have already been distributed, as well as other relief items.

“Now that humanitarian staff are able to reach the most critical areas, we are doing everything in our power to assist the authorities in bringing people the aid they desperately need,” said Eamonn Murphy, the Acting UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Myanmar.

While the weather has improved, water is now flowing south towards the Bago, Ayeyarwady and Yangon regions and there are concerns that river levels will rise and cause flooding in new areas.

“The poorest children and families are going to be the hardest hit, and we need to build their resilience so they can cope with these kinds of crises,” said Shalini Bahuguna, the Acting Representative of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Myanmar. “We are working with the Government to get emergency messages out to local communities through radio, to tell people how to prevent water borne diseases.”

“The humanitarian response at the moment is prioritizing immediate life-saving needs, but as the waters recede and people return home, the international aid community will shift its focus to help communities rebuild their lives and livelihoods over the next weeks and months,” added Mr. Murphy.

Ban and Security Council condemn deadly terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia



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

7 August - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the Security Council have condemned the terrorist attack that took place on Thursday in Saudi Arabia, resulting in the death of at least a dozen people, for which the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has claimed responsibility.

“The Secretary-General reiterates that there is no justification whatsoever for terrorist attacks or attacks on places of worship. He hopes that the perpetrators will be swiftly brought to justice,” said a statement issued by his spokesperson.

The attack was perpetrated at a mosque at the headquarters of the Special Emergency Security Forces in the Asir Region of Saudi Arabia.

Members of the Security Council issued a statement to the press, in which they condemned the attack “in the strongest terms.”

“The members of the Security Council stressed again that ISIL must be defeated and that the intolerance, violence and hatred it espouses must be stamped out,” they added.

They further emphasized that such “continued acts of barbarism perpetrated by ISIL do not intimidate them, but rather stiffen their resolve” that there has to be a common effort amongst governments and institutions to counter ISIL and other terrorist groups.

In their fight against terrorism, States must ensure that measures taken comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law, the 15-member Council further noted.

With conditions worsening for refugees in Calais, UN urges comprehensive response

7 August - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today called once again for a comprehensive response to the worsening reception conditions for refugees and migrants in Calais, saying that the situation in the French port city is unmanageable.

There are an estimated 3,000 refugees and migrants in Calais and in the northern coast of France today – virtually the same number as last November, according to UNHCR. However, the rising death toll among refugees and migrants, at least 10 since the beginning of June, attempting to cross the Channel from Calais to the United Kingdom is a “worrying” development.

UNHCR remains concerned at the dire living and reception conditions in the makeshift sites around Calais.

“UNHCR is reiterating its call made since the summer 2014 for a comprehensive response – first and foremost by the French authorities – to the worsening reception conditions for refugees and migrants in Calais,” spokesperson Melissa Fleming told reporters in Geneva, describing as “dire” the living and reception conditions in the makeshift sites around the city.

“Security measures alone, though understandable, are unlikely to be effective by themselves,” she added.

Ms. Fleming said that many of these people are in need of international protection, having fled conflict, violence and persecution in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and Syria.

UNHCR encouraged the French authorities to gradually relocate people from the current informal settlements and provide them, as is the case in most European countries, adequate reception conditions in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region as well as in other locations.

“It is also essential to address the current significant delays for those who want to apply for asylum in France,” said Ms. Fleming, adding that women and children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking and require special attention by the French authorities.

“An exceptional response is urgently needed,” she stressed. “We also call on the United Kingdom and other EU member States to work in a collaborative manner with the competent French authorities in finding solutions for those in need of international protection – namely in cases where there are existing family or other links in another EU Member State in accordance with the existing European legislation.”

UNHCR voiced its readiness to further assist France, the UK and other EU member States in finding practical and comprehensive solutions.



Several thousand asylum-seekers and migrants from Syria, Iraq, Ethiopia, Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan are living in makeshift camps or in the streets in Calais, France. Photo: UNHCR/C. Vander Eecken

Mali: UN strongly condemns 'despicable' attack in Mopti region



A Malian woman with her children outside their makeshift shelter on the grounds of a former hotel in Mopti. Fighting forced them to flee their home in northern Mali. Photo: UNHCR/Helen Caux

7 August - The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali has strongly condemned the attack that took place today in the town of Sevaré, in the Mopti region, and led to the death of at least one person.

According to a news release issued by the mission, known as MINUSMA, unidentified armed men launched an attack on a Malian military site in Sevaré early this morning.

The attackers, who were pushed back by the Malian Armed Forces, then took refuge in a hotel in the town, with the confrontation between the attackers and the Malian Forces continuing throughout the morning.

“Available reports indicate that a member of the international personnel associated with MINUSMA was killed in the attack,” said the mission, which condemned this “despicable attack” in the strongest terms.

At the request of the Malian authorities, the mission has taken measures to ensure the transport of a Malian rapid intervention team from the capital, Bamako, to Sevaré as reinforcements for the national armed and security forces who are on location.

The mission has also reinforced security at the Sevaré-Mopti airport and deployed a medical team that is already stationed at the airport to provide any necessary assistance.

Established in 2013, MINUSMA carries out a number of tasks, including ensuring security, stabilization and protection of civilians; supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; and assisting the reestablishment of State authority in the country.

Assassination attempt prompts UN call for protection of human rights defenders in Burundi



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

7 August - Following this week's assassination attempt on one of Burundi's leading human rights defenders, an independent United Nations expert has called on the Government to ensure the protection of all rights activists.

Pierre Claver Mbonimpa was shot and wounded by unknown assailants in the capital, Bujumbura, on Monday. The attack was strongly condemned by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as well as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“The attempted killing of such a highly respected activist as Mr. Mbonimpa sends a very chilling message to all members of civil society and also the entire population,” the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, warned in a press release.

“The Burundian authorities should make it clear that such heinous attacks will not be tolerated and do their utmost to protect human rights defenders from future attacks,” he stressed, calling for immediate protection to be provided to Mr. Mbonimpa during his recovery in the hospital.

Mr. Forst also urged an independent and impartial investigation so that perpetrators are brought to justice with due regard to fair trial standards.

As President of the Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Incarcerated Persons (APRODH), Mr. Mbonimpa

has a longstanding record of advocating for the rights of prisoners and fighting against torture in Burundi. His work has been recognized internationally by human rights awards.

Mr. Mbonimpa has spoken out publicly about controversial issues, including on the recent presidential elections in the country, leading to his arrest and prolonged detention in 2014 and again in April 2015.

“I met Mr. Mbonimpa on several occasions during my visit to Burundi in November 2014, and he struck me as one of the most courageous and respected human rights defenders in the country. The other defenders that I met with referred to him respectfully as ‘The Senior’ (‘Le Doyen’),” the Special Rapporteur said.

“Together with other experts from the UN human rights system, we have repeatedly communicated our grave concerns to the Government about Mr. Mbonimpa’s situation and urged an immediate halt to such intimidating and harassing acts.”

Mr. Forst’s statement has been endorsed by the UN Special Rapporteurs on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye; on freedom of peaceful assembly and association, Maina Kiai; on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Pablo de Greiff; and Seong-Phil Hong, who currently heads the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back, in an unpaid capacity, on specific human rights themes.

INTERVIEW: “I believe that the country is at a very difficult stage of its development... But at the same time, there is hope” – UN envoy for Iraq Ján Kubiš

7 August - It has been six months since Ján Kubiš took up the post of the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Over that period, the Slovakian national and his team have had to face considerable challenges – much like the country itself.

The Government is struggling to rally support from Iraq’s various political groups and ethnic communities – precisely when, according to the UN envoy, unity is what it needs most to stamp out the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Daesh, which still occupies a third of the country.

In addition, the terrorist group’s systematic human rights violations have led to an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), whose humanitarian needs are growing every day, even as the attention of international donors is focused on numerous other crises around the world.



Ján Kubiš, Special Representative the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), addresses the Security Council on the situation in the country (July 2015). UN Photo/Loey Felipe

The country is a rare example of democracy in the region. The current Government emerged after democratic elections. You can see this in the work done by the Parliament and the political forces represented in it. You can see the vibrant civil society that is there.

Following a recent briefing to the UN Security Council, Mr. Kubiš shared with the *UN News Centre* his views on the latest developments concerning Iraq, including the need to ensure that some three million IDPs are able to eventually return to their homes, the importance of the international community’s continued support for the fight against ISIL and his faith in the country’s democratic institutions.

UN News Centre: You have been heading the UN mission in Iraq since February 2015. What is your assessment of the country’s current situation?

Ján Kubiš: Well, I believe that the country is at a very difficult stage of its development, in particular since the onslaught of

Daesh. It's a very complex situation, full of various influences, both within the country and in the region. But at the same time, there is hope, there is potential. And that is why I believe that the Iraqi people and Government as well as their supporters from the international community can still successfully stamp out Daesh and achieve a level of development that will contribute to the stability, security and prosperity of the country.

UN News Centre: What is UNAMI doing to help and what challenges does it face?

Ján Kubiš: We, as a mission, are facing many challenges; if anything, because the country itself is facing many challenges. We operate in various areas, including the humanitarian level mainly to support IDPs. The country now registers close to 3.1 million IDPs, and the UN is at the forefront, together with the Government, of the efforts to provide them with assistance. We are also starting to support those IDPs who are returning to their places of origin after these areas are liberated from Daesh. That is a massive task and, unfortunately, an underfunded one. So one part of my work as SRSG is to advocate in favour of, and try to raise financial support for, the Iraqi Government and the UN-led humanitarian efforts to help IDPs and other people in need.

Then, of course, another aspect of the mission has to do with the political "good offices" to raise support for the Government's programmes, mainly because these programmes contain elements that are important for bolstering political dialogue and leading the country toward a historic national reconciliation. We try to achieve this by being in contact with different political representatives who, along with the country's people, are supporting the Government, but also with various opposition groups based outside of the country, because we believe that only a comprehensive and holistic effort will eventually bring equality to the country's various components and minorities.

Another major area of concern is human rights, with a focus on women's rights, minorities' rights and children's rights. This is an extremely important part of our work. Dedicated members of our team are indeed working and following up on specific human rights issues all over the country, and we also work with the Government and other institutions on this aspect.

We should not forget about long-term objectives for the UN and the country, including economic and social development. So we try to be engaged in these areas as well.

Another element of our work consists in regional outreach as a way to mobilize the neighbouring countries and gain their support for the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi people.

UN News Centre: What are Iraq's strengths in dealing with its challenges?

Ján Kubiš: I believe that we should not only look at what the situation is in Iraq, but also at the environment. The country is a rare example of democracy in the region. The current Government emerged after democratic elections. You can see this in the work done by the Parliament and the political forces represented in it. You can see the vibrant civil society that is there. You can find different interesting concepts there that should help the country to stay united, to stay together and to work for the future. So this is one of Iraq's advantages.

A second advantage is that Iraq is full of educated people who are ready to work for the future of the country. And I believe this is a major one. I would add as well that we benefit from the increasing support of the international community, perhaps because of the perception that we can do better in Iraq than in some other regions and areas of the Middle East.

So I believe that the country has advantages. Eventually, what will underpin all of this is also the country's economic potential. Let's not forget that while Iraq is short of funding, short of money, short of revenue because of low oil prices, the fight against ISIL and terrorism in general, and the humanitarian crisis, it is potentially a rather wealthy country. So potentially, again, this is an advantage that they can count on.

UN News Centre: What impact does Daesh have on UN efforts in Iraq?

Ján Kubiš: A major one, if you consider that the priority of the international community is to fight this abhorrent manifestation of international terrorism and that the anti-Daesh coalition is actively supporting the Government of Iraq and

other components who are joining the fight against Daesh. All of this has triggered a wave of IDPs, which heavily influences the situation in the country and the work of the United Nations. Daesh equals abhorrent violations of human rights and minorities' rights... ethnic, religious, etc... and this is a major area for us to work on. It threatens the unity of the country and the future stability of the country, the region and even the world.

UN News Centre: What is the international community doing about Daesh, and have there been any signs of fatigue with the Iraq issue?

Ján Kubiš: I would say yes and no. There definitely hasn't been a sign of fatigue with regards to the fight against this manifestation of international terrorism that is increasingly a global threat. In fact, I believe that we will increasingly see determined and effective actions led by regional and international players against Daesh.

Meanwhile, there are many other world crises, in and outside of the region. There are situations that require a strong engagement from the international community. There are humanitarian catastrophes, not only in Iraq, but also in many other parts of the region and the world. And this means that donors sometimes tend to focus on the emerging crises and, in a way, pay less attention to the older crises that are already there. That's sometimes called donor fatigue; sometimes it's simply called prioritization, but it does affect the situation.

That's why one of our major tasks is to work with the international community and tell them: "Stay on course! Provide support to Iraq!" This is a case that is not only humanitarian – which means it needs compassion.

That's why one of our major tasks is to work with the international community and tell them: "Stay on course! Provide support to Iraq!" For example, European countries are now struggling in the face of the migrants who are trying to come to the continent. They are talking about addressing this phenomenon at its roots. What would be more efficient than to prevent waves of migration from Iraq and support IDPs that are still willing to stay in the country and go back to their homes? Even if this means giving hundreds of millions of dollars to the country this year and the next.

UN News Centre: Prior to Iraq, you were the UN's top official in Afghanistan. Are there any similarities between your experience there and what you are doing now in Iraq? And how does your experience in Kabul inform your experiences in Baghdad?

Ján Kubiš: There are many similarities, but I would say that they are more superficial than anything else. I believe that every situation is different and very specific. I try not to just automatically apply the experience learned from a previous situation to a new one, but it is also true that parts of the methodology and approach are applicable. So I'm trying to utilize my experiences from previous conflict situations and put them to good use when dealing with the situation here in Iraq and in the region.

UN News Centre: What adjustments did you have to make, if any, after coming to Iraq?

Ján Kubiš: First of all, as always – family life. But this is normal; this is a non-family mission. Second of all, I'm trying to learn quickly – as quickly as possible – the local realities. I've been following the situation in Iraq and the Middle East for the past two, three decades, so I was not completely unprepared for the realities on the ground and had prepared myself before going to Iraq. But it is still a learning curve for me.

UN News Centre: On a more personal note – Tajikistan, Afghanistan and now Iraq – what is it that draws you to work in such difficult and challenging places?

Ján Kubiš: People! Because people, unfortunately, are the ones who pay for the missteps and mistakes, misperceptions and misdeeds of politicians. And they pay for it, unfortunately sometimes, with their own lives and well-being. This is one of the main reasons that always compelled me to help people by getting involved in different conflict situations. Of course, it is much better to do conflict prevention, and during a major part of my life I was busy doing conflict prevention. But if the conflict is already there, then fair enough, let's at least have some conflict mitigation and then conflict resolution. It is something that is a part of my life. So it is indeed about people.



UN News Centre: You lived in a fortified compound in Kabul and do the same in Baghdad. Can you tell us what that is like and what one does to take one's mind off the daily grind of working in such conditions?

Ján Kubiš: For me, it makes almost no difference because I am working long hours so I don't feel any pressure. It's more for my colleagues. They – and I as well – need from time to time to maintain some distance between the workplace and the personal sphere. This is very difficult to do in a compound like the one in Bagdad. It creates problems, tensions. So yes, it's a difficult environment. My recipe is to work, but you cannot do it endlessly. So there must be some other activities and, eventually, the ability for us to visit and be with our families, have a change of environment for several days in a row and then come back to this artificial environment in which we live and work.