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South Sudan: four years on, UN marks 'grim' independence anniversary amid ongoing conflict

8 July - The people of South Sudan are preparing to mark the fourth anniversary of their country's founding amid ongoing suffering, unconscionable levels of violence and unspeakable sexual abuse, according to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

In a statement issued earlier today and ahead of the country's milestone – which will officially be observed on 9 July – the Secretary-General recalled the sense of joy and hope felt across South Sudan in the early days of 2011 as it became the world's youngest nation – a stark contrast to today's reality when hope across the African State remains “in short supply.”

The security situation in South Sudan has deteriorated steadily over the past year since political in-fighting between President Salva Kiir and his former Vice-President, Riek Machar, and their respective factions erupted in December 2013. The hostilities subsequently turned into a full-fledged conflict, resulting in reported atrocities and possible war crimes.

According to the latest estimates released by the UN refugee agency, more than 730,000 people have fled into neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan, which has seen the highest arrival rate this year. Meanwhile, another 1.5 million remain internally displaced, often relocated to increasingly overcrowded 'protection-of-civilians' sites run by the UN's Mission in South Sudan, also known as UNMISS.

“The violence that has ravaged South Sudan over the past 18 months proves that there can never be a military solution to



Children at a protection of civilians site in Juba, South Sudan, run by the UN Mission, perform at a special cultural event in March 2015. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

this conflict. I therefore call on all leaders of South Sudan – particularly President Kiir and former Vice-President Riek Machar – to prove their leadership by investing in a political solution and immediately concluding a comprehensive peace agreement,” Mr. Ban declared. “At the same time, the international community must take decisive steps to help end the fighting.”

“Political leaders on both sides must make unequivocal public statements that the targeting of civilians will not be tolerated. All parties to the conflict must know that those responsible for serious human rights violations will be held accountable for their actions,” he added.

To that point, the Secretary-General reaffirmed the UN's commitment to support a political solution while continuing to make every effort to provide vulnerable populations with protection and humanitarian assistance. This latter task, he stated, was all the more critical as “brave and dedicated” humanitarian workers and UN staff continued to operate in “dangerous and dire conditions.”

“It is important that we show the parties a single way forward, with the full support of the region and the international community,” he continued. “Peace, development and human rights are the birthright of all the people of South Sudan. The promise of a new nation that they celebrated four years ago must finally be redeemed.”

Meanwhile, addressing a press briefing yesterday in Geneva, spokesperson Adrian Edwards, of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) warned reporters that political efforts to bring an end to the conflict had so far failed and that the outlook for the affected populations remained “grim.”

“This is a volatile and insecure situation which prevents humanitarian access,” Mr. Edwards declared. “Ongoing hostilities and a reported increase in human rights violations and abuses have contributed to additional displacement.”

The UN agency spokesperson added that recent weeks had seen an escalation in violence across South Sudan's Unity and Upper Nile states, with heavy fighting reportedly forcing tens of thousands of people to flee to the bush, swamplands and other “difficult to reach” areas.

In addition, reported atrocities – including the alleged raping and immolation of women and girls – have further contributed to the massive displacement of South Sudanese populations.

Humanitarian efforts aimed at helping those affected by the surge in fighting have also been impeded by funding shortfalls.

UNHCR has explained that its refugee assistance programmes – launched in collaboration with 38 other partners – are currently requesting \$810 million but remain only funded at 13 per cent.

At this rate, the agency has noted, resources remain insufficient to provide adequate food and water rations and health services to hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese.

UN officials recall 'horror' of Srebrenica as Security Council fails to adopt measure condemning massacre



UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

8 July - As the United Nations Security Council failed to adopt a resolution that some of its permanent members called “vital” and others called “divisive,” senior UN officials stressed that the horror of the genocidal massacre at Srebrenica continued to haunt the Organization 20 years after thousands of ethnic Bosnian Muslim men and boys were slaughtered during a week of preventable brutality.

The lessons learned from those “unspeakable” days in July 1995 still reverberate throughout the United Nations, according to UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson who, along with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein joining in via videoconference, urged better efforts aimed at prevention and greater cohesion among the international community as it confronts a growing litany of crimes against humanity perpetrated around the world.

The UN officials' remarks came as the Security Council prepared to table a vote on a draft resolution strongly condemning as genocide the crimes at Srebrenica as established by the judgments of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and all other proven war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the course of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The measure – which failed to pass with 10 votes in favour, four abstentions (Angola, China, Nigeria and Venezuela) and the Russian Federation voting against – would have further agreed that “acceptance of the tragic events at Srebrenica as genocide is a prerequisite for reconciliation.” If one of the Council's five permanent members casts a negative vote on a resolution, the text cannot be adopted.

“We gather in humility and regret to recognize the failure of the United Nations and the international community to prevent this tragedy,” Mr. Eliasson told the 15-member Council this morning ahead of a vote, marking the 20th anniversary of the tragic events in which 8,000 men and boys who were killed by Bosnian Serb forces who overran Srebrenica – the largest such massacre on European soil since the Organization's founding.

“The United Nations has acknowledged its responsibility for failing to protect the people who sought shelter and relief in Srebrenica.”

Since the tragedy unfolded in Srebrenica 20 years ago, the Deputy Secretary-General explained, the UN has, in many ways, improved its methodology by which it confronts the threat of war crimes, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Prevention, he said, has now become “an imperative.”

“Peacekeepers are now regularly provided with robust mandates to protect civilians,” Mr. Eliasson continued. “They are often authorized to use all necessary means in defence of populations.”

But, he added, peacekeepers continue to face many of the same challenges that plagued the UN in Srebrenica, not least “paralyzing divisions among Member States and a lack of political and material support.”

As a result, the UN and the Security Council would increasingly have “a central role to play” in strengthening prevention efforts, enforcing the responsibility to protect those in danger and enforcing the right of all people to live in “peace and dignity.”

“The world looks to us here at the United Nations and to the UN Security Council and expects us to uphold that right and to meet those aspirations,” Mr. Eliasson affirmed. “That is our shared responsibility today. And it is how we can best pay homage to the victims of Srebrenica.”

We got it wrong – so wrong



Drawing comparisons between the “catastrophe” of Srebrenica and an array of concurrent crises facing the UN in Syria, Sudan, Central African Republic, as well as Burundi and Myanmar, High Commissioner Zeid, meanwhile warned that “so long as there is no respect for the UN, it will be likely that further massacres will be perpetrated.”

“If the UN is to make good on its commitment to protect civilians,” Mr. Zeid told Council members via video link from Geneva, “it must be resolute, undivided and clear about its intention.”

He added that the deeper lessons for the UN remained as relevant today as they were twenty years ago.

“Our inability to anticipate events, so prevalent then, is still with us today; and our recurrent failure to understand with whom, and with what, we are dealing,” he confirmed.

In a comprehensive recounting of the events leading up to the massacre, Mr. Zeid laid out a veritable *mea culpa* of what he termed the UN’s “clumsy” efforts in addressing the growing threats on the ground during the early days of the Bosnian conflict. From wavering displays of authority to a non-committal use of force in countering an increasingly scaled-up Bosnian Serb aggression against ethnic minorities, the UN rights chief described the Organization’s “hesitation” and “timidity” as being key to the Srebrenica tragedy.

“We got it wrong, so wrong, although the people of Srebrenica knew full well who they were confronted with and what was in store for them,” he stated. “We simply had not stopped to think about these issues in sufficient depth.”

The most foundational lesson of Srebrenica, Mr. Zeid continued, was that for it to succeed in areas of conflict, the UN “must be respected.

“For the UN to be effective in robust peacekeeping, all the parties to the conflict, and in particular the aggressor, must take the measure of this Council, its decisions and the UN presence on the ground. They must believe there will be serious consequences and no impunity,” he concluded.

Alarmed by melting glacier in Norway, Ban says world must 'act now' to curb climate change



At Norway’s high Arctic region, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (centre) visits Blomstrandbreen glacier to be briefed by scientists and observe first-hand the advances of climate change since visiting in 2009. Seated to his right is Foreign Minister, Børge Brende of Norway. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

8 July - At the site of a rapidly shrinking glacier in the Norwegian Arctic, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed the need for the international community to “take action now” to fight climate change.

“I am just close to 250 metres to the glacier. It looks magnificent. But at the same time, I am alarmed that there are so many cracks that will soon break. They are melting very rapidly, and I fully agree with what scientists have been projecting. Unless we take action now, we will have to regret. We have to keep global temperature rise below two degrees as soon as possible.”

Preparing for the upcoming meeting of the States parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that will take place in Paris in 2015, the UN chief was in Norway this week to attend a number of high-level events. On board the research vessel RV Lance, he seized that opportunity to see first-hand the changes in the Blomstrandbreen

glacier since he last visited in 2009.

“The fjord behind us has been open every winter, throughout the winter because the ocean is warmer. So we have seen a lot of change since the Secretary-General was here last time,” said Kim Holmén, International Director of Norwegian Polar Institute.

“Glaciers on land are also a very visible example of the change in climate. Every year they are retreating and here in this area we have a lowering of the surface of approximately one meter per year, due to melting,” added the Director of Norwegian Polar Institute, Jan-Gunnar Winther, who travelled with the Secretary-General on board the research vessel RV

Lance.

Besides taking an excursion to Blomstrandbreen, Mr. Ban today received briefings at the Kings Bay Marine Lab and the Svalbard Satellite Station, both in Norway.

With fast action to rescue staple crops 'we can save lives' in DPR Korea,' UNICEF says

8 July - Children are already suffering as a result of drought in some parts of the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK), where deaths of young children attributed to diarrhoea have increased seriously in the first six months of 2015 in the drought-affected provinces, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

“The situation is urgent,” said UNICEF Regional Director Daniel Toole in a press release. “But if we act now – by providing urgently needed expertise and prepositioning supplies – we can save lives.”

According to the agency, rainfall figures and information from humanitarian agencies and the DPRK Government indicate that parts of the country are already facing serious drought. Several of the country's drought-affected provinces are key sources of staple food crops, UNICEF said, putting imperilling the main harvest, which could dramatically increase the numbers of children at serious risk.

“If we delay until we are certain of crop failures, it may well be too late to save the most vulnerable children,” Mr. Toole warned.

UNICEF said its personnel have recently met with local health officials in affected provinces of DPRK who confirm reports of significant increases in diarrhoea among children, as the absence of rain threatens access to safe water and sanitation.

“Lack of rain reduces access to clean water and undermines effective hygiene, putting children's lives at risk,” according to Mr. Toole. “UNICEF has already received reports that the incidence of diarrhoea – globally a leading cause of death among young children – has increased seriously in the first six months of 2015 in the drought-affected provinces.”

Data UNICEF has received shows that three provinces, North Hwanghae, South Hamgyong and South Hwanghae, are most affected by the decline in rainfall.

UNICEF's concern about the impact of the drought is heightened by the existing poor nutritional status of many children in DPRK.

A 2012 study showed one-quarter of all children in the country had symptoms of chronic malnutrition – a condition that is usually caused by a combination of unsafe water and poor sanitation, inadequate food intake, and inadequate access to health services.

UNICEF has released prepositioned emergency supplies to help those in the worst-affected provinces, including water purification tablets, water storage containers and health supplies for children with severe acute malnutrition. Training on how to treat children with severe acute malnutrition has also been stepped up.



At a clinic in Nampo City, DPRK, children wait to receive nutritional supplementation on Child Health Day, in November 2014 (file).
UNICEF/UNI180565/Basurmanova

UN agriculture agency partners with Italy's Autogrill to cut food waste and support small farmers



Restaurants and food and beverage stores worldwide have become increasingly aware of their role in cutting waste and making food chains more sustainable.
Photo: FAO/Jonathan Bloom

8 July - The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization today announced a partnership with Autogrill –the multinational food and beverage provider best known for its full-service highway rest stops and airport eateries – to cut food waste and introduce products of small-scale farmers in developing countries.

“Under the three-year agreement, FAO will provide Autogrill with tools to track and reduce food losses and waste across its more than 4,000 stores and design information materials and campaigns to raise awareness among Autogrill customers worldwide about waste reduction,” the Rome-based UN agency said in a press release.

FAO said it is estimated that roughly one third of the food produced globally for human consumption – approximately 1.3 billion tons every year – is lost or wasted.

The Italian-based chain, Autogrill, which operates mainly in Europe and North America, is the latest to sign on to the Save Food global initiative spearheaded by FAO to involve a wide range of actors along the food chain in common strategies to cut food loss and waste.

"This is a new type of public-private partnership for FAO which could become a model for collaborations with other retailers in future," said Eugenia Serova, FAO's Director of the Rural Infrastructure and Agro-Industries Division.

In addition to tracking and reducing waste, the restaurant chain will also pay attention to the sourcing of its products, in the framework of their corporate social responsibility.

FAO, which has been working with farming cooperatives and producer organizations worldwide to improve small producers' livelihoods, will help Autogrill identify products and small-scale farmers interested in supplying the global retailer as a way to open new markets to southern producers.

At UN Economic and Social Council, ministers commit to 'people-centred' post-2015 development agenda



Mohamed Khaled Khiari, Chair, Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

8 July - The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) today committed itself, through a Ministerial Declaration, to establishing a new set of inclusive sustainability goals that build on the successes of and the lessons learned from the landmark Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are set to wrap up at the end of 2015.

“We, the Ministers, are committed to establishing a strong, universal, ambitious, inclusive and people-centred post-2015 development agenda that will build on the foundations laid and experiences gained by the Millennium Development Goals, complete the unfinished business and respond to new challenges,” reads the declaration which was adopted by ECOSOC at the opening of its Annual Ministerial Review.

Since Monday, the Council has been holding the Ministerial portion of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development, under the auspices of ECOSOC.

Speaking on the behalf of the ECOSOC President, Martin Sajdik, Vice President Mohamed Khaled Khiari reminded delegations that a smooth transition from the MDGs to a transformative post-2015 development agenda will be “critical” for the future of global development.

But what does that mean for citizens around the world? What is their connection to the MDGs, or will be their relationship

to this new agenda? Mr. Khiari asked.

“The answer is simple: they mean change – tangible and real change that must improve people's wellbeing and that of our planet.”

It is those conditions, the Council Vice-President continued, that Member States cannot lose sight of the importance of putting in place the enabling environment for people to thrive, with sound policies, strong institutions and a respect for the rule of law.

“Good leadership and resilient populations create conditions that enable change, transforming the lives of individuals and their communities across the globe.”

The emerging post-2015 development agenda, including a proposed set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) that are to be adopted at a summit at UN Headquarters in September, strive to reflect lessons learned from the largely anti-poverty based MDGs, build on the successes and put all countries, together, firmly on track towards a more prosperous, sustainable and equitable world.

The next two days of the Annual Ministerial Review will be marked by an intense discussion on how to successfully transition from the MDG to the SDG era, Mr. Khiari explained. For him, ECOSOC is well placed to provide policy guidance on how global challenges can be addressed and how sound policies can be translated into “real life results.”

The High-level segment of ECOSOC is a key venue for the global dialogue on sustainable development, he stressed, adding that he is encouraged that this year's Review will include four National Voluntary Presentations, by the Governments of Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, the Philippines and Zambia.

It will also include a “mandated review” of implementation of the Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020. There will be a special session dedicated to this review, and the opportunities and challenges of those countries face in the transition will also be addressed in several other sessions, Mr. Khiari stressed.

“Let us unite to identify the most innovative paths forward for managing the transition from the MDGs to the post-2015 development agenda, keeping in mind who we have committed to: the people of this world, each and every one of them, and planet Earth itself. This period of transition is a vital part of what is to come. You may say: The future is now.”

Ebola cases evade detection due to ongoing lack of trust in communities – UN

8 July - The origin of the new cluster of Ebola cases is “not yet well understood,” the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) said today about the outbreak in West Africa where a residual lack of trust in the response means that some cases still evade detection for too long, increasing the risk of further transmission.

There were 30 confirmed Ebola cases reported in the week ending 5 July: 18 in Guinea, 3 in Liberia, and 9 in Sierra Leone, according to the WHO weekly update on Ebola, which notes that “significant challenges remain” in the fight to eradicate the disease, which has affected some 27,600 people, including more than 11,000 deaths.

WHO reported on Tuesday that the 6th meeting of the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee regarding the Ebola outbreak in West Africa advised that the outbreak continued to constitute a public health emergency of international concern and that exit screening should be continued in the three most-affected countries, namely Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The Committee had also advised those countries to strengthen cross-border collaboration and communication, particularly between Guinea and Guinea Bissau.



In Liberia, adolescent girls trained by UNICEF and partners are part of Adolescents Leading the Intensive Fight against Ebola, or A-LIFE. Photo: UNICEF/Cody Griggers

Also in its weekly update, WHO said improvements to case investigation and contact tracing, together with enhanced incentives to encourage reporting and compliance with quarantine measures have led to a better understanding of chains of transmission.

This, in turn, has resulted in a decreasing proportion of cases arising from as-yet unknown sources of infection” particularly in previously problematic areas such as Boke and Forecariah in Guinea, and Kambia and Port Loko in Sierra Leone, the agency said.

The chief of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) Peter Graaff, meanwhile, travelled to Port Loko today to get an update.

“A residual lack of trust in the response among some affected communities means that some cases still evade detection for too long, increasing the risk of further hidden transmission,” WHO said, adding that “the exportation of cases to densely populated urban areas such as Freetown and Conakry remains a risk, whilst the origin of the new cluster of cases in Liberia is not yet well understood.”

The latest assessments comes two days before UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is hosting a one-day high-level

International Ebola Recovery Conference at UN headquarters on Friday to ensure that recovery efforts go beyond redressing direct development losses to build back better and ensure greater resilience.

The conference held in cooperation with the Governments of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and in partnership with the African Union, the African Development Bank, the European Union and the World Bank, will focus international attention on the need for targeted investments to support recovery priorities over a 24-month time frame.

Such investments are expected consider the broader risk landscape that includes health, governance and peace building within the three countries and the Mano River sub-region.

The conference offers an opportunity to discuss detailed country-based and regional anti-Ebola strategies, and provide a platform to secure pledges of international support that can complement African Union-led efforts and help fill technical and resource gaps.

Afghanistan: UN officials welcome direct talks between Government and Taliban



Nicholas Haysom, UN Special Representative for Afghanistan. Photo: Fardin Waezi/UNAMA

8 July - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his Special Representative in Afghanistan Nicholas Haysom have welcomed direct talks held between Afghan Government and Taliban representatives in Islamabad, Pakistan – urging both parties to move towards reconciliation and peace.

In a statement issued today by his spokesperson in New York, Mr. Ban welcomed the direct talks between Afghan Government and Taliban representatives, which were held yesterday in Pakistan.

“[The Secretary-General] reiterates his support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. He expresses his appreciation for the commitment of the parties and the constructive role of the host, Pakistan,” said the statement.

In a separate news release, Mr. Haysom, who is also head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) also welcomed direct talks and urged both parties to move towards reconciliation and peace.

Recalling that at last month's briefing to the UN Security Council he had specifically urged direct talks between the parties, Mr. Haysom reiterated the Afghan people's desire to end the pervasive violence affecting every aspect of their lives.

“In the long term, peace is not a luxury, it is a necessity,” Haysom said. “I welcome the direct face-to-face engagement by the parties as the only way to achieving progress towards a negotiated agreement and ultimately the peace that Afghanistan deserves.”

Noting the importance of acknowledging the talks as the beginning of what could be a long and challenging process, Mr. Haysom expressed his appreciation to the parties for taking this significant first step and to the Government of Pakistan for hosting the meeting.

These talks should be recognized as the outcome of the recent concerted efforts at rebuilding relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Small farmers can be major actors in reducing agriculture's carbon footprint - UN agency



Farmers growing lettuce and other vegetables in the highlands of Bevatu Settlement, Nadrau, Viti Levu, Fiji.
Photo: IFAD/Susan Beccio

8 July - Helping farmers adapt to the impacts of climate change can also significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, finds a new study released today by one of the agricultural agencies of the United Nations system.

“What this report shows is that smallholder farmers are a key part of the solution to the climate change challenge,” said Michel Mordasini, Vice President of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). “With the right investments, smallholders can feed a growing planet while at the same time restoring degraded ecosystems and reducing agriculture's carbon footprint.”

IFAD chose UNESCO's Our Common Future under Climate Change Science Conference in Paris to release details of its latest research with the Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

The study finds reducing emissions may not be as big a burden as some may believe and could be another benefit of adaptation activities. The study, released today, examines IFAD's portfolio of projects focused on making smallholder agriculture more resilient to climate change.

The Mitigation Advantage Report shows that thirteen IFAD-supported adaptation projects could reduce CO₂e emissions by 30 million tons. This represents about 38 per cent of IFAD's target to reduce 80 million tons of CO₂e by 2020 under its Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme. Launched in 2012, this program has become the largest global financing source dedicated to supporting the adaptation of poor smallholder farmers to climate change.

Whilst IFAD's investments are focusing on the key priorities of rural poverty reduction, climate change adaptation and food security, the mitigation target set by the organisation shows how resilient, climate-smart agriculture can make a substantive contribution to the global fight to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

IFAD's climate change adaptation initiatives include improved agronomic practices, afforestation and rehabilitation of degraded lands. These practices help address farmers' immediate needs, like dealing with unpredictable rains, and gradual shifts in crop suitability.

If smallholder adaptation can help reduce global emissions, there could be new opportunities, according to Sonja Vermeulen, Head of research at the CGIAR program.

“Currently over 90 per cent of public and private climate funds go to mitigation, not adaptation. For future food security it would be very helpful if the majority of the world's farmers, who are smallholders, could access those funds,” she said.

Amid stalled reconstruction, UN official says 'root causes' of Gaza crisis still unresolved

8 July - The root causes of last year's conflict in Gaza – which claimed nearly two thousand lives and ravaged large swathes of the Palestinian enclave – remain unaddressed despite a growing humanitarian crisis in the area, the head of the United Nations agency assisting Palestinian refugees has warned.

In a statement issued earlier today, Pierre Krähenbühl, the Commissioner General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), voiced concern that the “despair, destitution and denial of dignity” resulting from the 2014 war with Israel and from the ongoing blockade remain “a fact of life for ordinary people in Gaza,” adding to the mounting humanitarian burden with which they are faced.



Children in a refugee camp in Khan Yunis, Gaza. Photo: UNICEF State of Palestine/Eyad El Baba

“The physical and psychological scars are everywhere to be seen in the Gaza Strip. Countless children live with the traumas endured during the war and over a thousand live with what will be life-long disabilities,” Mr. Krähenbühl declared. “This should be a reminder that conflicts are first and foremost measured by the human cost that they inflict.”

Last summer's 51-day conflict killed 1,462 civilians, including 551 children, and injured many thousands across the Gaza Strip. Six Israeli civilians, including one child, were also victims of the hostilities, which caused close to \$1.4 billion in direct and indirect damages and \$1.7 billion in economic losses to the Palestinian territory, according to the UN.

At the same time, Gaza today is home of the highest unemployment in the world, with more than 60 per cent of young people not working. Moreover, food insecurity affects 73 per cent of the population. An estimated 80 per cent of the population relies on humanitarian aid, mainly food assistance. Electricity is available only eight to 12 hours a day, also affecting water supply which covers a fraction of daily needs. Up to 90 million litres of partially-treated sewage are being discharged into the Mediterranean Sea every day due to electricity and fuel shortages. Finally, maternal mortality rates are estimated to have nearly doubled in the last 12 months.

The hostilities also wrought widespread structural devastation across the Strip. Some 100,000 people remain internally displaced as a result, hosted in temporary accommodation or in make-shift shelters. Close to a 120,000 people are still waiting to be reconnected to the city water supply. Work has yet to begin on a number of key health facilities.

Mr. Krähenbühl lamented the halting reconstruction of Gaza's homes noting that 315 days on from the ceasefire, “not a single totally destroyed house, of which there are over twelve thousand, has been rebuilt.”

“Resolute political action is required on a number of fronts to achieve the necessary change of paradigm in the Strip, starting with a lifting of the blockade, ensuring rights and security for all, allowing increased exports from Gaza to stimulate economic recovery and freedom of movement for civilians,” he continued. “While some steps have been taken in recent weeks, they fall far short of what is needed to bring about fundamental change in the lives of the population.”

Despite the Strip's “dire circumstances,” the UN official added, UNRWA's efforts to assist families were continuing unabated, with the first relief packages aimed at helping refugee families to rebuild their homes slated to arrive this week.

“While the numbers are small, and it comes very late, this development could be significant if sufficient quantities and the desperately needed funding can be obtained,” concluded Mr. Krähenbühl. “In an increasingly unstable Middle-East, neglecting the needs and rights of the people of Gaza is a risk the world should not be taking.”

Nigeria: Ban strongly condemns Boko Haram attacks targeting Muslims and Christians



Refugees in Minawao camp, Cameroon, after fleeing violence by Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria. Photo: WFP/Sofia Engdahl

7 July - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today strongly condemned attacks by Boko Haram in Lake Chad Basin countries, including the deliberate targeting of Christian and Muslim worshippers during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in Nigeria's northeast states of Borno and Yobe.

“The Secretary-General takes note of [Nigerian] President Muhammadu Buhari's determination to root out this menace, and commends the countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Benin for their steadfast efforts in the fight against Boko Haram,” according to a statement issued this evening by Mr. Ban's spokesperson in New York.

News agencies report that extremist violence against both Muslims and Christians left dozens of people dead in Nigeria's northern town of Zaria earlier today. This follows nearly a week of deadly Boko Haram-led attacks in the region, including over the weekend, described in the media as bombings and indiscriminate shooting into crowds of civilians.

In his statement, Mr. Ban extended his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims.

“The Secretary-General renews his calls to support the operationalization of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) through the provision of the requisite political, logistical, and financial resources and necessary expertise, consistent with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law,” the statement concluded.

Earlier in the afternoon, Mohammed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA), briefed the Security Council on the situation in the region, including on the activities of Boko Haram.

Since May, he said, Boko Haram had stepped up its attacks in the Lake Chad Basin area – not only in Nigeria, but also in Niger and Chad – mainly against civilian targets, although the structure and capacity of the group for conventional warfare had been largely destroyed through regional action supported by international partners, which he called commendable.

He said that further vigilance and coordinated regional action against Boko Haram was needed, however, and more support from all partners remained crucial. Addressing the root causes of the insurgency was a requirement for lasting stability. In addition, a coordinated post-conflict strategy was required to help restore living conditions and allow the return of displaced persons.