



## In the headlines:

- UN chief welcomes 'milestone' signing of ceasefire agreement in Myanmar
- Egypt, Japan, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay elected to serve on UN Security Council
- In Rome, Ban says refugee and migration crisis is a 'defining moment for Europe and the world'
- Ebola virus persists in body fluids of survivors for months – UN health agency
- UN deputy chief urges 'transformation' in collective effort to tackle 'staggering' humanitarian needs
- Burundi: Ban condemns killing of 11 people in Bujumbura, urges prompt investigation
- UN agency hails pledge by more than 100 cities to fight hunger and improve nutrition
- 'Rural women are the backbone of sustainable livelihoods,' Ban declares on International Day
- On Handwashing Day, UNICEF warns inadequate hygiene endangers key development goal
- Urgent appeal by UN rights expert to stop 'abhorrent' attacks against persons with albinism
- Despite 'relative' calm in Kunduz, full conditions for humanitarian assistance not yet restored – UN
- New law threatens civil society independence in Kazakhstan, warns UN expert

## **UN chief welcomes 'milestone' signing of ceasefire agreement in Myanmar**



Soldiers from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, an ethnic armed group, walk near Pahlai village in Myanmar's Shan State in September 2015. Photo: Htoo Tay Zar/IRIN

**15 October** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed today the signing of a ceasefire agreement in Myanmar as "a milestone" and expressed his hope that the new government formed after next month's elections will keep moving forward along the present path of negotiations.

"The United Nations recognizes that the consolidation of a nationwide cease-fire and the commencement of a comprehensive political dialogue will open the way to a new path of sustainable peace after decades of civil war that have cost numerous lives, uprooted hundreds of thousands from their homes and robbed successive generations of their dignity, tranquility and normalcy," Mr. Ban said in a statement issued by his spokesperson after the signing in Nay Pyi Taw by the Government, the Myanmar defense forces and several ethnic armed groups.

He went on to say that the "public commitment made by the Government to work for a federal union based on democracy and equality is a milestone" and that the negotiation process that resulted in this agreement has built greater confidence among all stakeholders.

"It needs to be followed up and made more inclusive during the coming months," he said.

The signing today, said Mr. Ban, "marks an important step in advancing national reconciliation and consolidating the reform process in the country."

He congratulated President Thein Sein for his leadership and noted that "although some important groups have not yet decided to take this step, today's signing reflects a recognition by leaders from the Government, as well as from the Ethnic

Armed Organizations, of the people of Myanmar's genuine aspiration to end long years of conflict and live together in peace.”

The UN chief expressed his hope that the new government formed after the 8 November elections will continue to move forward along the present path of negotiations, building on these understandings.

“The United Nations remains prepared to contribute to the next stage of the peace process in accordance with the unified expectations of all stakeholders,” he said.

And he went on to urge all stakeholders, signatories and non-signatories, to work together for a peaceful future in a constructive and forward-looking spirit, saying “this will require cooperation, determination and a commitment to reinforce trust and overcome the grievances of the past.”

He underscored that “only an inclusive and structured political dialogue as well as non-recourse to military action in all areas will help build the basis for sustainable peace on the ground.”

And finally, the UN Secretary-General expressed his hope that next month’s elections will be conducted in “a credible and transparent manner and strengthen the foundations of a genuine multi-ethnic democracy in the country.”

## **Egypt, Japan, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay elected to serve on UN Security Council**

**15 October** - In one round of voting the United Nations General Assembly today elected Egypt, Japan, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay to serve as non-permanent members on the Security Council for two-year terms beginning on 1 January 2016.

New members Egypt, Japan, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay will serve until 31 December 2017.

The five overall seats available for election in 2015, distributed regionally, were: two seats for the African Group (currently held by Chad and Nigeria); one seat for the Asia-Pacific Group (currently held by Jordan); one seat for the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (currently held by Chile); and one seat for the Eastern European Group (currently held by Lithuania).

The Western European and Others Group is contesting no seats this year, as its two seats (currently held by New Zealand and Spain) are up for election every even calendar year.

The five permanent Council members, which each wield the power of veto, are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The non-permanent members that will remain on the Council until the end of 2016 are Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and Venezuela.

Under the UN Charter, the Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Each of the Council’s members has one vote. Under the Charter, all UN Member States are obligated to comply with Council decisions.

The Security Council takes the lead in determining the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression. It calls upon the parties to a dispute to settle it by peaceful means and recommends methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. In some cases, the Security Council can resort to imposing sanctions or even authorize the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security.

The Security Council also recommends to the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary-General and the admission of new Members to the United Nations. And, together with the General Assembly, it elects the judges of the International Court of Justice.



Conference officers hold up empty ballot boxes for inspection prior to the vote to elect five non-permanent members of the Security Council. UN Photo/Cia Pak

## In Rome, Ban says refugee and migration crisis is a 'defining moment for Europe and the world'

**15 October** - The current refugee and migration crisis is a “defining moment” for Europe and the world, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared in Rome today, where in an address to Italian Government officials, he thanked Italy for its “compassionate and courageous response” while continuing his strong call on all countries to bear more of the responsibility.

“Italy has always been a bridge across cultures and continents,” he told the Chamber of Senate and Deputies in Rome in an address kicking off his three-day official visit to the country.

“Today, you have drawn on this experience to forge a strong, courageous and compassionate response to the biggest refugee and migration crisis since the end of the Second World War. I commend highly the men and women of Italy who have saved tens of thousands of lives.”

He thanked Italy for its “resources, energy and empathy for the thousands of desperate people arriving here in search of safety,” noting that Italy was a leader in European rescue efforts.

“These are urgently needed to stop the thousands of needless deaths that are turning the Mediterranean into a sea of tears,” he said.

The UN chief stressed that millions of forcibly displaced people from Syria are being hosted by its neighbours, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq and some in Egypt and North Africa. Like those countries, Italy’s shoreline makes it a frontline state for refugees from the Middle East and Africa, he stressed.

While applauding the global solidarity shown by these countries in bearing more than their share of responsibility, he went on to emphasize: “proximity does not equal final responsibility. All countries have the same duty no matter how close they are to a crisis.”

“The war in Syria is the world’s worst humanitarian crisis,” he continued, adding that his Special Envoy, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, a former Deputy Foreign Minister of Italy, is leading the effort “to forge a lasting political solution.”

The Secretary-General also noted the threat to peace posed by violent extremists across the Middle East, North Africa and beyond.

“We must stop the atrocities, especially the attacks against women and girls,” he said. “We must also end the destruction of cultural heritage.”

He went on to recall the scores of Italians who have lost their lives in the cause of peace and stability. “We thank the thousands of sons and daughters of Italy who have served under our blue flag of the United Nations over the years,” he said, noting the murder of 13 Italian peacekeepers in the Congo in 1961.

“Today – out of all the western nations – Italy is the top troop contributing country to United Nations peacekeeping operations,” he continued. “Italian support has been especially valuable for the United Nations mission in Lebanon. The fighting in Syria is putting intense pressure on Lebanon – and the United Nations is doing everything possible to respond, with Italy’s critical support.”

He also welcomed Italy’s renewed commitment to foreign aid and its goal to become a top donor among G7 nations, and praised its backing for preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution.



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) arrives in Rome, Italy. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Turning his remarks to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, he called on Italy “to lead on this bold agenda” and welcomed its Government’s Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) on climate change, which had been submitted in the context of the European Union.

In his concluding remarks, the Secretary-General noted that “the UN is now facing, like all members of the UN Member States, many crises: security and peace crises, humanitarian crises and the abuse of human rights,” adding that what was needed was “global solidarity, global support.”

## **Ebola virus persists in body fluids of survivors for months – UN health agency**



Ebola vaccine team at work in Katongourou, Guinea. Photo: WHO/S. Hawkey

**15 October** - The Ebola virus can persist in the eye, semen, the placenta, breast milk and central nervous system of survivors of the disease for as long as 9 and a half months, according to a new study supported by the World Health Organization (WHO).

A preliminary study on Ebola virus persistence in the semen of male survivors in Sierra Leone has found that some men still produce semen that tests positive on real time for nine months or longer.

“One participant was still positive 9.5 months after his illness began,” WHO said in a press release.

WHO said these results are from “baseline” samples provided by 93 men participating in the study being jointly conducted by the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health and Sanitation, WHO and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The latest findings come as WHO reported there were no confirmed cases of Ebola in West Africa in the week to 11 October, making it the second consecutive week with zero confirmed cases. But WHO also notes that, a patient who was reported as a case in the United Kingdom on 29 December 2014, and who later recovered, was hospitalized last week after developing late Ebola-related complications.

“All of the men who were tested in the first three months after their illness began were positive (9/9; 100 per cent). More than half of men (26/40; 65 per cent) who were tested between four to six months after their illness began were positive, while one quarter (11/46; 24 per cent) of those tested between seven to nine months after their illness began also tested positive,” the study showed.

“It is still not known how long the virus can persist in semen, but this study will yield more information about how long it takes for men to clear Ebola virus from semen,” WHO said.

WHO said it currently recommends that male Ebola survivors should be offered semen testing at 3 months after onset of disease, and then, for those who test positive, every month thereafter until their semen tests negative for virus twice with an interval of one week between tests.

“Until such time as their semen has twice tested negative for Ebola, survivors should abstain from sex or use condoms, practice good hand and personal hygiene by immediately and thoroughly washing with soap and water after any physical contact with semen, including after masturbation,” the health agency said.

The study will be widened to examine viral persistence in other body fluids, in both women and men, post-Ebola.

“A growing volume of data from careful clinical observation and testing of people who have recovered from acute Ebola virus disease indicates that the Ebola virus can persist at various sites in the body for many months in some people,” WHO said. “Such sites include the inside of the eye, semen, amniotic fluid, the placenta, breast milk and the central nervous system.”

## UN deputy chief urges 'transformation' in collective effort to tackle 'staggering' humanitarian needs

**15 October** - Warning of the huge, almost uncontrollable human disasters facing the world – with a staggering 100 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance – United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson has urged global solidarity to meet “the heavy but inspiring responsibility” today’s global challenges demand.

“The numbers of afflicted people are overwhelming. But let us remember: they are not numbers. These are men, women and children enduring searing suffering and pain. All refugees deserve safety. Every migrant has the right to dignity” said Mr. Eliasson in his address to delegates gathered in Geneva for the Global Consultation on the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit. The Consultation began yesterday and wraps up tomorrow.



Deputy Secretary General Jan Eliasson at the Global Consultations for the World Humanitarian Summit. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

“No one should have to live with violence, discrimination or abuse of human rights. All of us have a responsibility, individually and collectively, to act,” he declared.

He also highlighted two messages from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the Global Consultation meeting, convened after a year of regional gatherings to set the stage for the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul next year.

Mr. Eliasson said the UN chief’s first message was the need for the international community to “prove to the vulnerable and afflicted people around the world that leaders hear their voices and are responding with compassion and resolve.”

And secondly, he said the Secretary-General urged everyone to “engage in committed and innovative preparations for the Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul to ensure that it is truly a meaningful step forward for the humanitarian imperative.”

Emphasizing that humanitarian action can never replace political solutions to conflict, Mr. Eliasson said the primary goal of the UN is to find peaceful and enduring settlements, while resolving humanitarian crises – often as conflicts rage.

“The demands are growing faster than our capacity and resources. If we do not address this serious stress symptom, we will have an even steeper hill to climb in the future. We have to get adequate means and we must do more on prevention, as well as on connecting humanitarian work to development,” said the Deputy Secretary-General.

For 2015, the United Nations asked for nearly \$20 billion to meet humanitarian needs – six times the level of a decade ago. “With these demands, we must explore ways to optimize our impact and streamline our efforts. We must be innovative and adapt to future conditions.”

He said that the Global Consultation marks the beginning of a new phase in the critical process towards “a transformation in how we deliver for our fellow human beings in need,” and urged delegations to now focus on the many useful proposals made during the consultations and arrive at a set of key recommendations for the Istanbul Summit.

The just-released report Restoring Humanity, a synthesis of the consultation process up to this point, has called for action around five key concepts: dignity, safety, resilience, partnerships and finance. Further, it calls for an integrated approach to humanitarian action, sustainable development, and the creation of peaceful societies. It requires solutions and actions dealing with root causes. It requires inclusive partnerships. And it requires new and diverse sources of funding.

Mr. Eliasson said that early next year, the Secretary-General will issue his Report on the World Humanitarian Summit, aimed to establish the UN chief’s vision for the landmark Summit “and spell out the actions and commitments we need.” It would also draw on the major “UN change agenda” ranging from the Sendai to the Addis, New York and Paris Conferences during 2015.



“We should see the Summit as an opportunity to prove that our ambitious vision of a life of dignity for all is achievable if we retain and strengthen our sense of justice and solidarity,” he said.

Opening the consultations yesterday, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Stephen O'Brien also reiterated the sentiment, and stressed that the human and economic costs due to natural and man-made disasters are staggering.

“This year alone, over 100 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. If that were a country, it would be the 12th largest in the world,” said Mr. O'Brien in his opening address. “Estimated economic losses due to natural disasters worldwide may now be as high as [\$300 billion] a year, and are expected to increase,” he added.

Mr. O'Brien also warned that unless immediate measures are implemented, projections indicate that the future could be even worse.

“The World Bank estimates that 1.5 billion people live in countries trapped in repeated cycles of violent conflict. The cost to the global economy is some US\$14.3 trillion per year - 13 per cent of the world's GDP [gross domestic product],” Mr. O'Brien reported.

According to Mr. O'Brien, violence and conflicts have forced over 60 million people around the world out of their homes. He pointed out that for millions of girls, this can mean the end of education, followed by early marriage and a sharp reduction in life chances. Being displaced at such a large scale could mostly mean years of insecurity and instability and dependence on governments and aid organizations.

“We carry the hopes of many on our shoulders. So let us get down to business and make this Global Consultation the crescendo of an extraordinary, inclusive, global process, which has brought us to this point and has given us so many inspiring ideas to work with.”

## **Burundi: Ban condemns killing of 11 people in Bujumbura, urges prompt investigation**



Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi, has been rocked by political violence for months. Photo: Phil Moore/IRIN

**15 October** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today condemned the recent killing of nine civilians and two police officers in Burundi's capital Bujumbura, amid exchanges of heavy gunfire in several neighbourhoods of the city.

A statement issued by Mr. Ban's spokesperson indicated that the civilians, including a staff member of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) named Evariste Mbonihankuye, were reportedly shot at close range. The incident took place Tuesday.

“The Secretary-General extends his deepest condolences to the families of the victims,” the statement noted. “He urges Burundian authorities to undertake a rigorous and prompt investigation into the circumstances and motives behind these despicable crimes in order to ensure that their perpetrators are brought to justice.”

According to the United Nations, Burundi is facing its deepest political crisis since the end of the civil war, after President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for a controversial third term in office. A broad array of actors warned that his attempt was unconstitutional and contrary to the spirit of the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi.

Since April 2015, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has registered more than 130 killings and hundreds of cases of arbitrary arrest and detention.

## UN agency hails pledge by more than 100 cities to fight hunger and improve nutrition

**15 October** - Cities have a key role to play in ending hunger and improving nutrition, the head of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said today, welcoming a commitment by more than 100 cities from around the world to make food systems in urban areas more equitable and sustainable.

“A majority of the population of the world already lives in cities and the urban population is going to increase, particularly in developing countries,” FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva said in a press release.

“Unfortunately, many cities cannot ensure regular and stable access to adequate food and water for all, nevertheless food security and nutrition remains overlooked in urban planning and development,” he warned.

Meanwhile, at a mayors’ summit in Milan organized in the context of the Expo Milano universal trade exhibition under the theme “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life,” Mr. da Silva applauded Milan’s Mayor Giuliano Pisapia and his counterparts from other cities for signing the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact.

Through the agreement, cities adhere to four principles: guaranteeing healthy food for all, promoting sustainability in the food system, educating the public about healthy eating, and reducing waste.

Urban centres will be key actors in achieving the globally-agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the eradication of hunger by 2030, Mr. da Silva said, noting that achieving these goals or sustaining them in the long run will also require tackling climate change and reducing emissions.

He also referred to the need to address unhealthy or wasteful practices. “Obesity grows at alarming rates, particularly in urban areas of middle and upper income countries, where diet changes are driven by people’s lifestyles,” he said, underlining how food waste in cities is increasingly higher.

“Among other reasons, urban customers often discard fruits and vegetables that don’t look good, even when they are perfectly fresh,” Mr. da Silva added.

The framework for the Urban Food Policy Pact, which was developed with FAO’s technical assistance, recognizes the importance of an inclusive approach that brings together governments, private sector and civil society.

It also underscores the importance of enhancing the links between urban centres and their surrounding rural areas. In this context, Mr. da Silva cited innovative solutions such as the increase in small-scale urban and peri-urban agriculture that can produce food which helps to diversify and foster healthier diets of families and households living in cities.

Expo Milano began in May and continues until the end of October.



Urban agriculture is on the increase around the world. Photo: FAO/Giulio Napolitano

## 'Rural women are the backbone of sustainable livelihoods,' Ban declares on International Day

**15 October** - Marking the International Day of Rural Women, the United Nations today affirmed the role of women as significant and crucial for the progress of rural households, local and national economies.

"They are farmers and farm workers, horticulturists and market sellers, business women and community leaders. Rural women are the backbone of sustainable livelihoods and provide food security for their families and communities," said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his message marking the occasion.

Mr. Ban also noted that the International Day falls just after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development last month. He urged the global leaders to seize the opportunity offered by the new framework to transform rural women's lives.

"The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have gender equality and women's empowerment at their core, and include a target to "double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women." Indeed, rural women are critical to the success of almost all the 17 SDGs," said Mr. Ban.

"We must build resilient social protection systems, labour and product markets, governance institutions, and civil society organizations so that rural women can both contribute to and benefit from sustainable development," said the Secretary-General.

The sentiment was shared by UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka who also reaffirmed that rural women play a key role in underpinning sustainable development and further stressed that following the framework of Agenda 2030 will help in accelerating progress for rural women.

"As we launch Agenda 2030 globally and locally, we must learn from the lessons of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We have an unparalleled opportunity and commitment to end poverty and hunger, achieve food and nutrition security, and guarantee sustainable livelihoods by investing in rural women and climate-resilient agriculture," said Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka.

However, according to MDG indicators, rural women suffer disproportionately from poverty, and face multiple forms of discrimination, violence and insecurity as compared to rural men and urban men and women.

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka observed that at the Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Commitment to Action, the top political leaders of Angola, Colombia, Jordan, Paraguay, Senegal and Viet Nam highlighted intersecting forms of discrimination for girls and women living in poverty in rural areas.

"They include economic and financial barriers to girls' education such as the elimination of school fees and provision of stipends, scholarships and non-financial support, particularly in rural and remote areas. Legal reforms are needed to guarantee women's equal right to property and to realize sexual and reproductive health and rights," added the Executive-Director.

She urged to address these barriers to rural women's progress with measures that are compliant with the Agenda 2030.

She also stressed on increasing access to healthcare, provision of free or subsidized essential drugs and commodities, access to family planning measures and upgrading their skills through agricultural extension services.



Women in Assouba, rural Côte d'Ivoire, preparing igname (yam) to sell. UN Photo/Patricia Esteve



Highlighting the role women can play in addressing climate change activities, the Executive-Director reported that in Bangladesh, targeted steps are being taken with 19,000 women, to prepare for its known vulnerability to climate change.

“Women’s participation in local institutions for governing natural resources is critical for sustainable land, forest and water management, as well as for building resilience and planning for climate change and adaptation strategies,” said Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka.

“Addressing the adverse effects of climate change through climate-resilient agriculture strategies and natural resource management is increasingly important for securing rural women’s rights, empowerment, and well-being,” she added.

Although women constitute 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, many of them are without ownership of the lands they work in and neither do they have an authoritative voice in local governments.

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka stressed that this can only be changed if the global leaders take every opportunity to ‘ensure that rural women do not lag behind, but rather lead the way.’

“The International Day of Rural Women is an opportune moment to amplify rural women’s voices and experiences from around the globe. Let us act on our commitment to creating opportunities for rural women across every relevant goal – and thereby advance progress for all,” added Mr. Ban.

## On Handwashing Day, UNICEF warns inadequate hygiene endangers key development goal

**15 October** - More than 40 per cent of health facilities have no water resources within 500 metres in sub-Saharan Africa where the practice of handwashing with soap is dangerously low even though it is “one of the cheapest, simplest, most effective health interventions,” the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said today.

“Along with drinking water and access to toilets, hygiene – particularly handwashing with soap – is the essential third leg of the stool holding up the [Sustainable Development] Goal on water and sanitation,” said Sanjay Wijesekera, global head of UNICEF’s water, sanitation and hygiene programmes, in a press release.

The eighth Global Handwashing Day, marked annually on 15 October, comes less than a month after all 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which includes the target of achieving access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene by 2030. UNICEF pointed out that it’s the first time hygiene is included in the global agenda.

“From birth – when unwashed hands of birth attendants can transmit dangerous pathogens – right through babyhood, school and beyond, handwashing is crucial for a child’s health,” Mr. Wijesekera said. “It is one of the cheapest, simplest, most effective health interventions we have.”

Sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the highest child mortality rates globally, has particularly low levels of handwashing. According to UNICEF and the UN World Health Organization (WHO), levels are at best 50 per cent in 38 countries in the region.

Even health care facilities often lack places for handwashing: “Some 42 per cent of them in WHO’s Africa Region have no water source available within 500 metres,” the UNICEF press release underlines.

In addition, UNICEF says improvements in hygiene must supplement access to water and sanitation, or children will continue to fall victim to easily preventable diseases like diarrhoea.

To mark the international day, activities are being organized around the world which aim to teach the importance of



UNICEF Ambassador for South Asia, cricketing legend Sachin Tendulkar, teaches correct handwashing to a student in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 12 October 2015. Photo: UNICEF Sri Lanka/Pathum D Magalle

handwashing with soap especially to children.

## Urgent appeal by UN rights expert to stop 'abhorrent' attacks against persons with albinism

**15 October** - The first United Nations human rights expert on albinism today issued an urgent appeal for coordinated action in southern and eastern Africa to tackle the upsurge in attacks against persons with albinism.

Albinism is a congenital condition which, according to the UN World Health Organization (WHO), is most common in sub-Saharan Africa affecting one in every 5,000 to 15,000 persons, compared to one in 17,000 to 20,000 in Europe and North America. In several ethnic groups in the sub-Saharan region, estimates are as high as one in 1,000 to 1,500 persons.



Albinism is a common genetic disorder in Equateur. Monieka, Democratic Republic of the Congo. UN Photo/Marie Frechon

“Persons with albinism are amongst the most vulnerable persons in the region,” noted the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, Ikponwosa Ero, in a news release.

“After centuries of chronic neglect of their plight, they have been relegated to the fringes of society where stigma and discrimination in every aspect of their lives have been normalized.”

Ms. Ero, who has albinism herself, warned that “an apparent increase in demand for body parts of persons with albinism” has been reported in the run up to elections in several African countries.

“Today, their woe has been compounded by a constant fear of attacks by people – including family members – who value their body parts more than their life,” she stressed. “I am deeply concern at the highly disturbing pattern of increase in attacks when elections occur in the region.”

Ms. Ero called on affected governments “to carry out as a matter of urgency specific measures particularly through regional and international collaboration to bring an end to these abhorrent crimes.” She also urged “all political parties to ensure that their candidates and supporters are not associated directly or indirectly with such grave human rights violations.”

Since the UN Independent Expert took office on 1 August, attacks have been reported in six countries in the region. These include the case of a 56-year-old man with albinism from Kenya who was attacked with some of his body parts hacked off. He later succumbed to his injuries.

A month earlier, the remains of the dismembered body of a 20-year-old woman with albinism were found in a shallow grave in her village of Phelandaba in South Africa. Most of her body parts as well as her skin were missing. The expert welcomed the prompt reaction of the South African authorities that led to a 20-year conviction for two of the perpetrators involved.

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

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the position of Independent Expert on Albinism was created “as a way to focus attention and provide much needed information and discussion on the issue.”

Meanwhile, the first-ever day for International Albinism Awareness was marked last June. It was described by UN officials as an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of people with albinism and join the struggle against the difficulties they face.

## Despite 'relative' calm in Kunduz, full conditions for humanitarian assistance not yet restored – UN



A woman registers to pick up her aid package in Kunduz city, Afghanistan, in April 2015 after escaping fighting in her district between the Taliban and government forces. Photo: Bethany Matta/IRIN

**15 October** - While reports indicate that Kunduz city centre in northeast Afghanistan remains relatively quiet, with sporadic fighting taking place on the outskirts, full conditions for the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance have not yet been restored, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

This is due to continuing concerns related to contested control in some areas of the city, the existence of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and the potential for ambushes on some roads leading the city, according to a situation update released by OCHA.

Some civilians and relief partners have reportedly entered Kunduz city by road on 11 and 12 October, and an initial shipment of medical supplies has been moved by air.

Water and electricity have been restored to some parts of the city, but other basic services remain unavailable due to damage from the conflict, according to OCHA, which also indicated that an estimated 14,000 families are currently displaced in northeast Afghanistan. Critical needs for these internally displaced persons (IDPs) include food and shelter, as well as health and water, sanitation and hygiene needs.

Additional funding is required for the 2015 Humanitarian Response Plan; of the \$417 million requested, \$203 million has currently been received.

## New law threatens civil society independence in Kazakhstan, warns UN expert



Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association Maina Kiai. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

**15 October** - The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, today warned that a new bill amending the law on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kazakhstan, may compromise the independence of associations and also challenge their existence.

The new draft law sets up an operator with rights to allocate both governmental and non-governmental grants, which includes grants from international organizations, diplomatic missions or international not-for-profit organizations, to non-governmental organizations.

“The possibility for a centralized Government’s operator to distribute all grants irrespective of sources, be it public or private funds, enables the authorities to arbitrarily limit resources and to control the entire not-for-profit sector,” Mr. Kiai cautioned.

“By controlling the sources of funds, the draft law would limit associations’ functional autonomy and put their independence and existence at serious risk,” he said.

The expert underscored that access to financial resources is a vital and integral part of the right to freedom of association.

Additionally, he recalled that similar appeals were made at the end of his visit to Kazakhstan earlier this year, including maintaining the independence of associations and inclusion of civil society groups in public debate.

He reiterated his call to the Kazakh authorities to repeal the draft law.

The amendments which were adopted by the Senate last week, will now be held at the Lower House of Parliament for its final consideration.

The draft law also bars associations from using more than 10 per cent of governmental grants for administrative expenditures.

The UN expert noted that other countries which adopted such measures have had a devastating impact on civil society organizations.

“Many were forced to stop their activities, leaving society deprived from these organizations’ essential contribution in the economic, cultural, political and social fields and devoid of important voices often representing the most marginalized,” he added.

Mr. Kiai stressed that existence of free civil societies are crucial for a country with significant democratic and development aspirations as they ‘ensure diverse voices are included in decision making process.’

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