UN allocates $15 million in emergency funds for Nepal earthquake response

28 April - In response to severe devastation caused by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake and many strong aftershocks that have hit Nepal since 25 April, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator today released $15 million through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to enable humanitarian aid organizations to rapidly scale up operations and provide immediate assistance to people in desperate need.

“With the death toll rising and millions of people affected, it’s a race against time as humanitarian agencies work around the clock to reach people and communities,” said Valerie Amos, who is also Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. “This allocation from CERF means that critical life-saving work can be scaled up immediately.”

A statement released by the Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that the funding, which would not be possible without the generous support of CERF’s donors, will enable recipient humanitarian agencies working with partners to prioritise the most immediate needs, including logistics, shelter, water and health.

It is estimated that more than 3,300 people have been killed and over 6,000 injured in Nepal and neighbouring countries since the earthquake hit on Saturday and aid workers expect those numbers to rise as they access remote areas closer to the quake’s epicentre.

With a total of 39 districts affected by the earthquake, eight million people have been affected, including two million in the 11 most severely affected districts.
More information on the $15 million funding injection will become available in the coming days, the OCHA statement said, adding that the money will boost immediate assistance to people in need. Additional resources will be vital to supporting and sustaining aid efforts in the coming months.

Among resources already arriving in Nepal, a Spokesperson for the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees announced today that an airlift relief supplies will arrive in Kathmandu today from their warehouse in Dubai, supplementing aid already deployed.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva, the Spokesperson said shelter materials are among the most urgently needed relief supplies, with many people living in makeshift camps and open areas amid rain, because of damage to their homes or because they are too scared to return as aftershocks continue.

“UNHCR has emptied our warehouse in eastern Nepal and sent five trucks carrying plastic sheets and solar lamps for over 40,000 quake survivors in three districts east of Kathmandu,” said the Spokesperson. “This morning our staff handed over some items to local authorities in Sindhuli, where at least nine people were killed and some 5,000 homes destroyed in the disaster. Our team is proceeding north-east towards Ramechhap. The road has been blocked by a landslide and we have arranged to transfer the items to other vehicles mid-way. Other aid trucks are on their way to Okhaldunga in a neighbouring zone.”

The Head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, today expressed her condolences to the government and people of Nepal after the earthquake that struck on Saturday.

“This tragedy underlines the importance of the work of the Government and the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium launched on International Day for Disaster Reduction in 2009,” said Ms. Wahlström. “There was great awareness throughout the country that a disaster of this magnitude was imminent and retrofitted hospitals have been able to withstand the impact of the earthquake.”

She said Nepal had raised the issue of a major earthquake at last month's World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Japan where countries adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction which outlines the priorities for reducing disaster risk over the next 15 years.

“When the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase gets underway it will be an opportunity to build back better and make the country more resilient to disasters,” she said. “Earthquakes claim more lives than any other disaster type and this tragedy underlines the importance of implementing the guidelines on land use and building codes laid out in the Sendai Framework and its predecessor, the Hyogo Framework for Action.”

**Yemen: UN warns of impact to relief efforts amid ongoing fighting across country**

28 April - The continuing violence in Yemen has heavily impacted the country’s healthcare facilities and services further aggravating an already precarious humanitarian situation, the United Nations relief arm has warned.

In a press release issued earlier today, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that violence had disrupted services at two major health facilities in the conflict-ridden Gulf state.

According to OCHA, militants entered the Al Jumhouria Hospital in the south-western city of Aden on 27 April and opened fire causing patients and doctors to flee. Meanwhile, following an attack last weekend, the main hospital in Haradh, which serves more than 150,000 people, remained deserted.

The UN has reminded all parties to the conflict that they remain “legally obliged” under international humanitarian law to respect and protect civilians and to spare them from the effects of the fighting and called for “all attacks on hospitals must...
Against that backdrop, water processing plants that supply drinking water to the capital, Sana’a, have closed and public transport and operations at financial institutions have been reduced because of the lack of fuel, OCHA’s press release continued.

It added that humanitarian partners are estimating that more than 300,000 people have now been displaced by the escalating conflict, particularly in Hajjah, Al Dhale'e and Abyan Governorates while food distributions in Hudaydah Governorate will stop today due to a lack of fuel.

At the same time, OCHA cautioned that relief efforts in other locations will also run out of fuel in the next few days, impacting tens of thousands of people.

The situation in Yemen has been deteriorating since the country formed a new Government in November 2014 aimed at ending a period of political turbulence and bringing about a full transition towards democracy. Nonetheless, the country has continued to be plagued by violence and mass political demonstrations despite UN efforts to bring about a peaceful political resolution.

**At Vatican meeting, UN chief and Pope Francis discuss climate change, Mediterranean migration**

28 April - During a meeting with His Holiness Pope Francis today, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he very much looked forward to the Pontiff’s encyclical on climate change, which he said he believed would act as a moral voice on the issue.

Mr. Ban and Pope Francis met on the margins of a workshop organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences called ‘Protect the Earth, Dignify Humanity,’ which explores the moral dimensions of climate change and sustainable humanity.

As well as discussing climate change, a readout of the meeting issued by a UN spokesperson in New York said Mr. Ban briefed Pope Francis on his visit yesterday to the Italian Navy vessel *San Giusto* where he was briefed on the on-going operations to rescue migrants in the Mediterranean.

They also discussed several other issues including social exclusion and the situation in South Sudan, as well as human trafficking and contemporary slavery, and the role of sport as a tool for education and human development.

The Secretary-General provided an update on his Global Education First initiative in the forthcoming global education forum to be held next month in Korea and on the ongoing review conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in New York. They reaffirmed their commitment to continue to work for a world free of nuclear weapons.

Lastly, the Secretary-General said he very much looked forward to the Pope’s visit to the United Nations in September.
Air pollution in Europe costs $1.6 trillion a year in deaths and diseases, UN study shows

28 April - The United Nations health agency reported today in first-of-its-kind study that air pollution across Europe is costing “a staggering” $1.6 trillion a year in deaths and diseases, which amounts to nearly one tenth of the region’s gross domestic product.

The economic cost of the health impact of air pollution in Europe is the first assessment of the economic burden of deaths and diseases resulting from outdoor and indoor air pollution in the 53 countries of the region, according to the study, which was carried out by the World Health Organization’s Regional Office for Europe and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The study was published as more than 200 representatives from European countries and international and non-governmental organizations gathered in Haifa, Israel, from 28 to 30 April to look at achievements, gaps and challenges and set future priorities. The cost of the health impacts of air pollution is one of many studies that will provide evidence on the environmental impacts on health to be released at the Haifa meeting.

“Reducing air pollution has become a top political priority,” Christian Friis Bach, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) said.

According to the WHO announcement, “a staggering $1.6 trillion is the economic cost of the approximate 600,000 premature deaths and of the diseases caused by air pollution in the WHO European Region in 2010, according to the first-ever study of these costs conducted for the Region.”

“The economic cost of deaths alone accounts for over $1.4 trillion,” according to the study. “Adding another 10% to this, as the cost of diseases from air pollution, results in a total of almost $1.6 trillion.”

In addition, the study showed that “in no less than 10 of the 53 countries of the Region, this cost is at or above 20 per cent of national gross domestic product (GDP), and amounted to nearly one tenth of the GDP of the entire European Union in 2013.

“The economic value of deaths and diseases due to air pollution – $1,600,000, 000, 000 – corresponds to the amount societies are willing to pay to avoid these deaths and diseases with necessary interventions,” it explained. “In these calculations, a value is attached to each death and disease, independent of the age of the person and which varies according to the national economic context.”

WHO said another new report, From Parma to Haifa: how far have we gotten?, jointly published by WHO and UN-ECE, informs that one in four Europeans still falls sick or dies prematurely from environmental pollution.
UN peacekeeping chief wraps up trip to Central African Republic as Mission reaches full strength

28 April - The United Nations peacekeeping chief finished a four-day trip to the Central African Republic today, his visit to the country coinciding with the UN stabilization Mission there achieving full operational capability for the first time.

“I leave the Central African Republic calm and reasonably optimistic,” said Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations during a press conference in the capital, Bangui, today at the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

“Protection of civilians is improving continuously because we have developed targeted actions and coordinated protection,” he added.

Reaching full operational capability with the deployment of additional capabilities authorized by the Security Council after the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the country (BINUCA) was subsumed by MINUSCA, the Mission, set up in September 2014, has developed an emergency operational plan to support national authorities in ensuring the holding of elections in a secure and timely manner before August this year.

Six months after the military and police components of MINUSCA began their work and on the day the Mission’s mandate was renewed by the Security Council in New York, Mr. Ladsous recalled that it was a time to measure the achievements of the Mission and he welcomed the work done by the Mission so far.

Reiterating the determination of the Mission to meet the challenge that is still posed in the security realm, he looked forward to improvements, saying that the arrival of attack helicopters and drones would help. He added that he hoped the political transition would be significantly boosted by the Bangui Forum.

“This momentous event will launch major reforms to the Central African people and will allow the Transition to give way to a democratically elected regime,” he said. “The Bangui Forum, followed by inclusive and credible elections, will be a key element in the successful conclusion of the transition,” he said, referring to the national gathering that will take place on 4 May.

He also pointed to the international community’s mobilization to deal with the crisis, saying it “reflects a unity of purpose to tackle the country’s long-standing crisis and treat the root causes of the conflict.”
Global tide of nuclear abolition has ebbed causing tensions among nations, Ban warns

28 April - Achieving a world free of nuclear weapons is “one of the most crucial debates of our time,” United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, emphasizing that the international tide of nuclear abolition – so strong in 2010 – has ebbed and mounting tensions between nuclear-armed States have produced a return to Cold War mind sets.

“Nuclear weapons are again becoming embedded in national defence strategies. Support has deepened for misguided doctrines of deterrence,” Mr. Ban said in a message delivered by UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Angela Kane to the Symposium and High-Level Panel on the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Nuclear Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Energy; Fresh Ideas for the Future.

“Modernization programmes envisage retention of these deadly weapons for decades to come. Nuclear weapon States have not demonstrated the leadership required to break the status quo, instead attaching hollow conditions to their disarmament obligations,” Mr. Ban added in the message.

The Symposium, a side event held in connection with the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which opened yesterday at UN Headquarters, was also expected to hear from UN Messenger of Peace, Michael Douglas.

“This Review Conference offers an opportunity to change the narrative; to remind all States parties that their collective good is best served by the full implementation of – and compliance with – all of the Treaty’s goals; and to put us back on course,” Mr. Ban said, calling on participants to provide ideas that will “propel us down the path to a world free of nuclear weapons.”

For over four decades, the Treaty has been a bulwark against the spread of the most dangerous and inhumane weapons ever devised, and it has been a central and essential mechanism for their elimination. Calling it “indispensable,” Mr. Ban said the Treaty has strengthened the security of all States parties, serving as a foundation for international security. Over the course of its history, the NPT has also helped cope with multiple challenges and competing positions.

While the ultimate goal of the NPT – to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and to bring about their elimination – has not changed, the international security climate has evolved and continued to do so, with new problems constantly “testing our resolve,” Mr. Ban said.

To be effectively implemented, the Treaty requires constant tending to ensure that it remains strong and capable of safeguarding against the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons.

“We need new ideas to shore up the NPT, to confront new obstacles head on, and to overcome them,” he said. “Proliferation challenges persist. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea continues with its dangerous and destabilizing activities, flouting international law and the will of the international community.”

At the same time, despite valiant efforts, the conference on a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction has not yet taken place, Mr. Ban noted. The benefits of such a zone are manifold, including regional peace and stability.

“We have seen the sheer emergence of a movement seeking to address the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. This has re-energized a frozen debate, reminding us that the indiscriminate and catastrophic costs of nuclear weapons are, at their core, human costs,” he added.

The 2015 Review Conference will run at UN Headquarters in New York through 22 May. The President-designate of the Conference is Ambassador Taous Feroukhi from Algeria.
The NPT is a landmark international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament. It represents the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to the goal of disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States.

**UN refugee agency assists hundreds of Libyans rescued at sea as Europe responds to migration crisis**

The heads of United Nations agencies with a stake in the current crisis in the Mediterranean Sea have pledged to working closely with the European Union (EU) following its decision “to mobilize all efforts at its disposal to prevent further loss of life at sea and to tackle the root causes of the human emergency.”

The joint statement issued yesterday by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN Special Representative for International Migration and Development, Peter Sutherland, and the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), William Lacy Swing, follows the European Council’s 23 April 2015 decision on migration.

Noting that “the Council’s decision is an important first step towards collective European action,” the officials said: “We look forward to working closely with EU and other stakeholders to expand and enhance the measures announced, with a view to setting in place a more holistic plan consistent with international norms and standards.”

Responding to a series of deadly shipwrecks since mid-April that has focused global attention on the risks refugees and migrants are willing to take to reach Europe, EU leaders met in Brussels last week to discuss a strategy to address the crisis, including through the proposed doubling the size of its Mediterranean search and rescue operations.

Meanwhile, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported that it and its partners have been able to help some of the 1,242 people picked up in Libyan waters and mostly taken to immigration detention centres since mid-April.

In their joint statement, the UN agency heads and the IOM chief reminded the European Union that “efforts to deter smuggling will be in vain unless measures are adopted to address overly restrictive migration policies in Europe, as well as the push factors of conflict, human rights violations and economic deprivation in many of the countries of origin and transit.”

“Law enforcement measures must be accompanied by efforts aimed at reducing the need for migrants and refugees to turn to smugglers in the first place,” the statement read. “The situation today calls for measures going beyond border security.”

The agency officials said they are drawing up plans to increase their support in a number of indicative areas, for example by: active diplomacy with States in Europe, Africa and elsewhere to safeguard the rights of all migrants and promote fair and equitable migration policies that contribute to sustainable development; stepping up operational support, as needed, in Southern and South Eastern Europe, North Africa and in the Horn of Africa; providing advice on the human rights of all migrants at points of origin, transit and destination; and promoting compliance with international standards for human rights in law enforcement.
On World Day, UN labour agency urges culture of prevention on occupational safety and health

28 April - Member States must work harder to consolidate safety and health prevention measures in the workplace, the head of the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) declared today as he urged the global community to do its utmost in reducing the number of occupational deaths, injuries and diseases around the world.

“Economic recession or pressure to maximize profits cannot justify cutting corners in workplace safety,” ILO Director-General Guy Ryder said in a statement issued today and marking the 2015 edition of the World Day for Safety and Health at Work.

“A long-standing ILO priority, occupational safety and health was recognized as a fundamental human right in the 2008 Seoul Declaration on Safety and Health at Work,” Mr. Ryder continued. “It is time to turn this human right into reality for workers everywhere.”

According to the UN agency, in fact, hazardous conditions remain a daily threat for tens of millions of workers around the world. Over 313 million workers suffer non-fatal occupational injuries each year, equating to 860,000 people injured on the job daily. Meanwhile, every single day, 6,400 people die from an occupational accident or disease, amounting to 2.3 million deaths each year.

The failure to address the problem, Mr. Ryder warned, was also coming at a high economic price.

“Four per cent of global gross domestic product, equivalent to an astounding $2.8 trillion, is drained off annually by costs related to lost working time, interruptions in production, treatment of occupational injuries and diseases, rehabilitation and compensation,” he continued.

The Director-General suggested that developing a cogent national culture of prevention involved a three-pronged strategy: respecting at all levels the right to a safe and healthy working environment; active participation of all stakeholders in securing a safe and healthy working environment through a system of defined rights, responsibilities and duties; and according the highest priority to the principle of prevention.

“Each and every one of us can contribute to the prevention of occupational deaths, injuries and diseases,” Mr. Ryder concluded. “Together we can build a culture of prevention on occupational safety and health.”

Dip in Southern Africa’s maize harvest could push up prices and boost import needs, UN warns

28 April - Southern Africa’s maize harvest is expected to shrink this year by some 26 per cent, a situation that could trigger food price increases and adversely affect recent food security gains, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned today.

For 2015, the early production forecast for maize – a staple food throughout the subregion – stands at about 21.1 million tonnes, some 15 per cent lower than the average for the last five years, FAO noted.

The fall is mostly due to the impact of erratic weather conditions, including the late start of seasonal rains in November, followed by heavy rains that caused flooding, and then a long dry spell in the southern areas of the subregion during February and early March.

“Last year, the subregion saw a bumper harvest, which has made this year’s harvest prospects look even weaker so we have to be cautious until governments, often with the support of FAO, have completed all the assessments in the coming days,” said David Phiri, FAO’s Subregional Coordinator for Southern Africa.
“The carry-over stocks from 2014’s bumper maize crop is expected to partly offset the impact of lower domestic production and somewhat contribute to stabilising national supplies in some countries,” he added.

Malawi and Zambia, the second and third biggest maize producers in the subregion, are also expected to register smaller harvests compared with the 2014 bumper crop. Lower maize harvests are also anticipated in Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

The poor outlook is already having some impact on cereal markets. South Africa recorded significant price increases in February – although the rise eased in March following improved rains. These price increases are expected to mostly affect those countries that rely more on maize imports such as Namibia where relatively high price increases were recorded in February.

In most countries, maize prices have remained below the same period last year due to the current ample supplies, which are expected to rapidly dwindle.

The poor outlook for 2015 is expected to result in increased imports in Southern Africa with forecasts for aggregate maize imports in the 2015/16 marketing year indicating an increase to about 1.8 million tonnes, approximately double the low level of 2014/15, the FAO said.

In Zimbabwe, large volumes of maize imports are forecast, and larger import volumes than 2014 are also forecast in the deficit-producing countries of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland. Given the contraction in South African export availabilities, alternative export supplies may be needed.

The expected decline in 2015 maize production follows a favourable year in 2014 when ample supplies and low prices contributed to improved food security conditions that resulted in a significant decline of people in need of food assistance in the subregion, with Zimbabwe, for instance, recording a 75 per cent decrease.

**Ban ‘deeply concerned’ over uptick in attacks against peacekeepers in Darfur**

28 April - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has voiced deep concern about the recent spate of attacks on United Nations peacekeepers serving in Darfur as well as the “limited cooperation” provided by the Government of Sudan in addressing the incidents, a spokesperson for the Organization has confirmed.

In a statement issued yesterday evening, the UN spokesperson’s office said the Secretary-General condemned the two successive attacks by unidentified armed groups that occurred in Kass, South Darfur on 23 and 24 April.

The first attack, on 23 April, took place at around 6:00 p.m., when around 40 gunmen on horses and camels opened fire on African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) troops protecting a water point. The attackers made off with one of the Mission's vehicles after shooting the driver. The peacekeepers pursued and recovered the vehicle. Four attackers were killed during the exchange and two peacekeepers injured, along with one of the attackers.

The following morning, a UNAMID patrol travelling from Nyala was attacked near the Mission's base in Kass. Four peacekeepers were injured during the exchange of fire.

“The Secretary-General urges the Government of Sudan to ensure that the perpetrators are swiftly brought to justice and take all necessary action to avoid further attacks on or threats against peacekeepers in Darfur,” the statement said, outlining that UNAMID had launched its own investigation into the incidents.

In addition, it noted that Mr. Ban deeply regretted the Government of Sudan's denial of a flight request for the emergency medical evacuation of an injured Ethiopian peacekeeper. The peacekeeper died hours later.
“The Secretary-General underscores the need for the Government of Sudan and the United Nations to work in full cooperation, especially in the context of the ongoing discussion on the UNAMID exit strategy,” the statement continued.

Mr. Ban also expressed his “appreciation and support” to UNAMID and its troops for their “tireless efforts to implement their mandate.”

**Burundi: Ban condemns election-related violence after President nominated as candidate**

28 April - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has today condemned the outbreak of violence in Burundi following the nomination of President Pierre Nkurunziza as the presidential candidate of the country’s ruling party, and appealed to all Burundians to “safeguard the hard won gains” made in peace and democracy.

President Nkurunziza was nominated by the ruling National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party with 88 per cent of the vote. That decision sparked civil unrest, with thousands of people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

“[Mr. Ban] calls on the Burundian authorities to conduct a prompt investigation into the deaths that occurred during the recent demonstrations so that those responsible are held accountable,” said a statement released from the Secretary-General’s spokesperson this morning.

According to the statement, the UN chief has dispatched his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Said Djinnit to Burundi for consultations with President Nkurunziza and other Government authorities, political party leaders and members of the diplomatic community.

“He calls on the Burundian authorities to uphold the human rights of all Burundians, including the freedom of assembly, association and expression,” the statement said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ban also called on the security services to remain impartial and exercise restraint in responding to public demonstrations and urged all parties to reject violence and avoid using inflammatory language or hate speech that could further increase tensions. He urged Burundians to resolve their differences through dialogue.

“[Mr. Ban] reiterates the commitment of the United Nations to support peaceful, credible and inclusive elections,” the statement added.

President Nkurunziza has been in office for two terms since 2005, and a broad array of actors has warned that an attempt to seek a third term is unconstitutional and contrary to the spirit that ended a decade of civil war in the country.

In related news, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Ariane Rummery told reporters in Geneva that the number of Burundian refugees crossing into Rwanda had jumped significantly, with over 5,000 refugees entering the country in just two days. According to the Government of Rwanda, since the beginning of April, nearly 21,000 Burundians, mostly women and children had fled to Rwanda saying that they had experienced intimidation and threats of violence linked to the upcoming elections.

The previous week, the official list of candidates to run in the Burundian Presidential elections on 26 June had been announced, which had sparked demonstrations and violence in the nation’s capital, she explained.

The Government of Rwanda had allocated land in Mahama, in the Eastern Province to open a new refugee camp. UNHCR and its partners were working moving refugees to the new Mahama refugee camp in daily convoys of up to 1,500 people.

Ms. Rummery said that due to the sharp increase of new arrivals, the conditions in the two reception centres, Bugesera and Nyanza, had become more and more congested and UNHCR is expecting to relocate all refugees by 1 May.
Since conducting a rapid assessment mission of the new site in Mahama sector, UNHCR had immediately mobilized its teams and partners to erect over 450 family tents to accommodate over 4,000 people, 7 hangars, 80 latrines, 80 showers, a health post and security post, she added.

**Security Council extends UN Western Sahara mission through April 2016**

**28 April** - The Security Council today extended for another year the mandate of the United Nations mission tasked with monitoring the ceasefire in Western Sahara, known by the acronym MINURSO.

In today’s resolution, the 15-member Council extended MINURSO until 30 April 2016. The Mission has been in effect since 1991.

Moreover, the resolution calls upon all parties to “fully cooperate” with the operations of MINURSO and calls upon them “to show political will and work in an atmosphere propitious for dialogue” in order to kick-off a more “intensive and substantive” phase of negotiations.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently reiterated his call for stakeholders involved in the 40-year conflict in Western Sahara to “seriously engage” with his Personal Envoy Christopher Ross and work to negotiate “a mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara,” according to his latest report on the situation in that territory.

The Secretary-General’s report, published on 10 April, underlined that “Forty years after the beginning of this conflict and eight years after the presentation of the Parties’ proposals, there can be no justification for continuing to maintain the status quo and failing to engage constructively and imaginatively in the search for a solution.”

Today’s resolution, meanwhile, affirmed the Council’s “full support” for the commitment of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy towards a solution to the question of Western Sahara within the context of dialogue and called for “renewed meetings and strengthening of contacts.”

The UN has been involved in efforts to find a settlement in Western Sahara since 1976, when fighting broke out between Morocco and the Frente Polisario after the Spanish colonial administration of the territory ended.

**Mali: senior UN official urges parties to ‘immediately cease hostilities’**

**28 April** - Amid an upsurge in violence in Mali, the top United Nations official there today warned parties about the serious consequences their actions could have on the country’s peace process.

“I urge the parties to immediately cease hostilities and to return to their positions. This resurgence of tensions imperils everybody’s efforts to restore lasting peace in Mali,” said Mongi Hamdi, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

At around noon today, MINUSMA was informed about an attack conducted by GATIA and MAA-Plateforme in the town of Ménaka, which is currently held by elements of the Coordination des Mouvements de l’Azawad (CMA). Shots were heard and MINUSMA deployed helicopters to assess the situation, according to a statement released by the mission.

“Early this morning, near Timbuktu, MINUSMA vehicles were targeted outside the city by the CMA. There were no
casualties. The CMA have indicated to us that this was an error on their part, and demand the departure of FAMA,” Mr. Hamdi said.

“These two events are extremely worrying as they endanger the peace process. We are currently establishing the facts,” added the envoy, who met on 26 April with representatives of the CMA, who reaffirmed their full commitment to the ongoing peace process.

“Months of intensive negotiations involving all parties to put an end to the crisis in Mali could be endangered. These actions constitute serious violations of the ceasefire agreements, which were also reaffirmed in the declaration of 19 February 2015,” he continued.

Mr. Hamdi also pointed to the statement by the President of the Security Council on 6 February, which suggested that appropriate measures would be considered, including the imposition of targeted sanctions against those who resume hostilities and violate the ceasefire.

“I therefore call for calm and reason to prevail for the benefit of all Malians. The crisis that has shaken Mali will only be resolved through dialogue. I remain convinced that all parties will demonstrate wisdom and reason to sign a historic peace agreement,” he said.

The ceasefire agreements signed by the parties foresee that they stay in their positions during the negotiations and that they abstain from any action – direct or indirect – that would undermine the prospects for peace. MINUSMA, which is completely impartial, insists that these commitments be respected by all.

The MINUSMA teams on the ground are completely committed to ending this “very worrying spiral of tensions as quickly as possible,” Mr. Hamdi said, calling for calm to give dialogue and peace a chance.

“I regret the turn of events, but I remain optimistic regarding the chances of seeing the peace process successfully concluded next month. There is no alternative to the signing of the peace agreement.”

In recent years, Mali has been confronted by a crisis with serious political, security, socio-economic, humanitarian and human rights consequences. The crisis stems from long-standing structural conditions such as weak State institutions, ineffective governance, deep-seated feelings among communities in the north of being marginalized and the effects of environmental degradation, climate change and economic shocks.

**Top UN official in South Sudan urges release of remaining child soldiers**

28 April - The United Nations Special Representative for South Sudan, Ellen Margrethe Løj, travelled to Pibor town in the eastern part of the country, where she met some of the recently released child soldiers and urged the release of the remaining children still being held by a militia group in the region.

The UN estimates that 13,000 children are associated with armed forces and groups nationwide in South Sudan, with credible evidence indicating that both of the warring parties have engaged in the recruitment of child soldiers since the current conflict began in December 2013.

In Pibor town today, Ms. Løj met with David Yau Yau, the chief administrator of the Greater Pibor Administrative Area and former commander of the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army-Cobra Faction.

According to a press release from UNMISS, Ms. Løj welcomed the release of nearly 1,500 child soldiers who once fought with Mr. Yau Yau’s militia and urged him to continue supporting efforts to secure the release of an estimated 500 child soldiers who are still associated with the Cobra Faction.
The Secretary-General’s Special Representative met with a group of some of the 500 former child soldiers who have been reunited with their families in Pibor Town.

“I am very encouraged by the success achieved by UNICEF and partners thus far in helping to obtain the release of these children, about a third of whom are 13 years old or younger,” she said. “But our work has only just begun.”

“In conjunction with local authorities, we must ensure that these children have access to educational and health facilities and are protected from any future attempt to enlist them again in any military organization,” Ms. Løj said.