In Vienna, Ban visits fusion restaurant that exemplifies ‘togetherness’ of refugees and locals

8 December – During his trip to Vienna, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today visited a restaurant where refugees work together with locals to serve Austrian-Arab fusion cuisine, using this opportunity to showcase the UN system-wide initiative to counter xenophobia launched in September.

“I was very impressed having met the master chef and chef from the Philippines and Syria. Many people, millions of people, are suffering because of the Syrian crisis. This is a good way of integrating into Austrian culture,” Mr. Ban said in his remarks at the year-old Habibi & Hawara restaurant, which is run by a team of refugees and Austrians, aiming to help refugees become independent entrepreneurs.

With millions of people on the move due to conflict, disasters and other crises, the UN chief recalled that he had launched the Together: Respect, Safety and Dignity for All campaign at the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants on 19 September.

“When refugees are coming, they are not coming with problems, they are coming with a different culture, different religion, different skills and different potential, so they can be a good mix with the Austrian and local community,” he said.

“Regardless of what kind of belief and traditions, what languages you may have, you must be treated as an equal partner, an
equal human being.”

He commended the Austrian community in that regard, asking not only Austrians but all Europeans and many people who can render their support as a part of “togetherness, the ‘Together’ initiative, that’s what I’m asking you,” Mr. Ban underscored.

He noted that at least 16 million people are now caught in the middle of this fighting and violence in Syria.

Recalling that he has met many Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, he said “it has been a quite heart-breaking experience for me to meet many young people, girls and boys, and old men and women, who lost completely their home and their livelihood.”

Mr. Ban has been urging world leaders, particularly in Europe, not to erect walls, but build a bridge between people, among people and between countries because those on the move have no other choice but to flee to save their lives to other foreign countries, stressing that it is unacceptable that leadership-level people and community people are showing discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes and making politically unacceptable remarks.

“All these are unacceptable in the name of humanity,” he said.

“We are together. We are the same brothers and sisters. We are the same people, men and women. There is no difference at all,” he said, noting that the UN is working over the next two years toward adopting a Global Compact that will ensure that all refugees will be supported based on global responsibility-sharing principles.

**Millions of ‘children on the move’ without protection is unacceptable – UN refugee agency chief**

8 December – Highlighting the challenges confronting the protection of millions of children, many of whom are separated from their families as they flee wars and persecution, the top United Nations refugee official today called for prompt action to stave off the risk of losing an entire generation.

“[Children] are exposed to criminal smugglers and traffickers. The fact that they often have no protection – even from people traveling with them – exposes them to all types of exploitation,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, opening his Dialogue on Protection Challenges in Geneva today.

“We cannot accept this. We need to fight back, we need to find ways to address this situation,” he stressed.

According to Mr. Grandi’s Office (UNHCR), children account for 51 per cent of the total 21.3 million refugees around the world and many of them end up in detention facilities, that can have a serious impact on their physical and mental health as well as their life-long development. They also miss out on years of education as a result of displacement.

Children are also particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation and the risk of statelessness.

In his remarks, High Commissioner Grandi recalled the commitments made by UN Member States this past September UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants and called on them to ensure that refugee and migrant children are protected.

UNHCR video: *Voices in the Dark: Hear from children forced to flee*
For instance, in the New York Declaration, the Summit’s outcome, Heads of States and Government reaffirmed their “commitment to protect the human rights of migrant children, given their vulnerability, particularly unaccompanied migrant children, and to provide access to basic health, education and psychosocial services, ensuring that the best interests of the child is a primary consideration in all relevant policies.”

Mr. Grandi further stressed that the detention of children to determine their migration status must stop and called on all States to document all child births in their territory to prevent and reduce the risk of statelessness.

He also called for timely solutions for children and youth – including expanding “legal pathways” such as resettlement opportunities and increased family reunion, as well as quick access to quality education.

Participants at the forum, some of whom had fled their countries as small children, welcomed the steps suggested by the senior UN official.

“Empowering young people so that, when they go back, they have the skills, the abilities to rebuild their countries [is] very important,” emphasized Joseph Munyambanza who had fled the Democratic Republic of the Congo when he was just six years old, accompanied by his older brother.

“If you don’t act now, you risk a lost generation,” said Joseph, now a 26-year-old young man.

Children on the Move is the theme of this year’s two-day annual High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Protection Challenges. The Dialogue concludes tomorrow.

**Sides ‘poles apart’ on agreeing access to civilians trapped in Aleppo, UN Senior Adviser reports**

8 December – Discussions on how to assist civilians caught in the crossfire inside war-ravaged Aleppo continue to be difficult “because the Member States that are supposed to help us get access [are] poles apart on what is happening in Syria,” United Nations Senior Adviser Jan Egeland said today in Geneva.

“We are not having a united humanitarian diplomacy on the parties and we see that in a diminishing access on the ground,” he told reporters after a meeting of the Humanitarian Access Task Force of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG).

The ISSG has established the respective taskforces on humanitarian aid delivery and a wider ceasefire. They have been meeting separately since early this year on a way forward in the crisis. Russia and the United States are the co-chairs of the taskforces and the ISSG, which also comprises the UN, the Arab League, the European Union and 16 other countries.

Mr. Egeland reported that the Syrian Government had approved a plan for access in order to reach 800,000 of the 930,000 people that the UN is trying to reach and that for the first time, eastern Aleppo is on the list of approved places. He acknowledged, however, that there has been a greater possibility of crossing a stable front line in November, when the UN was refused access.

He underscored that the UN has been trying to access east Aleppo every day since it was besieged on 7 July. Since then, three major plans have failed.

“I have never, in my many, many years of humanitarian negotiations, been in as difficult negotiations and as frustrating talks.
that produced nothing in spite of thousands of contacts with all of the parties, and it is with bitterness and frustration that we have to report that we have not been able to evacuate even the wounded,” he announced.

In order to provide humanitarian assistance, cooperation is necessary from the Government of Syria, the Russian Federation, various armed opposition groups, opposition health directorates, and others who must all agree on where, how, what conditions, guarantees, protection standards, and logistics.

“If only one disagrees,” he said, “the whole thing fails.”

The hope for humanitarian corridors will only become a reality if there is a ceasefire. Meanwhile, the intense battle scene continues and the civilian population has dramatically moved its location.

Mr. Egeland called for a pause so that civilians remaining in east Aleppo would be able to leave safely, as well as for a better protection system for those who are able to leave. The UN has received reports about confiscated identification cards, arrests, and maltreatment. The Senior Adviser lamented that such reports have been impossible to confirm without full access to the area.

Nor does the UN have full access to Government-controlled areas of western Aleppo, a result of which has been unconfirmed and mixed reports.

“Some say Aleppo is falling, some say Aleppo is liberated,” the Senior Adviser reported.

As winter plunges the city into freezing temperatures at night, the UN and its affiliate agencies, including the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, are anxious over their ability to provide winter shelter to the hundreds of thousands living in “a totally war-ravaged area.”

Members of the press questioned Mr. Egeland about the recent attack on a Russian hospital, the practical constraints of being able to access Aleppo, the some 700 wounded and sick children who remain in the city, and the status of talks between the United States and Russia.

Mr. Egeland condemned the recent attack that left several at the Russian hospital dead, adding that so far 770 health workers have been killed throughout the war. He also referred to “desperate appeals from inside Aleppo” and said that while Russia was committed to discussing how to organize evacuations, it would not promise a pause.

He shared that in the coming hours, stakeholders would concentrate on how to make evacuations possible and hoped that co-chairs of the United States-Russia talks would be able to provide “the beginning of something better.”
Civil conflict and unpredictable weather cast ‘long shadow’ on food security’ in 2016 – UN

8 December – This year, the world suffered many weather-related shocks and civil conflicts which pressured food security for many countries, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said today in a new report, which said that while the global agricultural situation is poised to improve in 2017, some 39 countries currently need food assistance.

The Crop Prospects and Food Situation report also projects favourable growing conditions for crops, and upcoming robust grain harvests, however, due to the lean seasons before the crops have matured in some regions, the hunger will most likely intensify.

Affected by El Niño, the number of people requiring food assistance in Southern Africa is expected to increase significantly, with very high stunting child rates in Madagascar, Malawi, and Mozambique areas.

El Niño is the term used to describe the warming of the central to eastern tropical Pacific that occurs, on average, every three to seven years. It raises sea surface temperatures and impacts weather systems around the globe so that some places receive more rain while others receive none at all, often in a reversal of their usual weather pattern.

Conflicts cast a long shadow on food security

The report has identified the root causes of food crises, such as shortfalls in food productions, lack of access due to low incomes, high prices, and local conflicts, including refugee movements.

Civil conflicts also led to loss and depletion of households’ productive assets, and to security concerns that interrupt farming activities. In part of Sudan, the ongoing conflict has reduced the ability to engage in agriculture, which can harm most vulnerable communities.

In addition, according to the report, the ongoing conflicts led to 9.4 million people in Syria in need of food assistance, more than eight million people in Afghanistan, and above eight million in Nigeria.

The weather has also affected many countries, especially Africa. As a result of droughts and El Niño, there is a decline in aggregated cereal production, and a decrease in maize output in Southern Africa, which led to harsh food conditions.

Agricultural trends appear poised to improve after rough 2016

Poor harvests triggered sharply higher prices for staple maize in Malawi, where 6.5 million people are expected to be food insecure during the upcoming lean period. However, preliminary estimates point to a 27 percent increase in maize plantings for South Africa's 2017 crop, by far the region's largest producer, said FAO.

While much of Asia benefited from robust food production in 2016, led by a sharp recovery in India, the impact of long-running conflicts in several Near Eastern countries continues to severely depress agricultural production despite generally beneficial weather conditions for staple grain crops. In Latin America and the Caribbean, expectations of a production rebound in Central America in 2016 are welcome, following the drought-affected outputs in the previous year.
Conflict in Ukraine continues to take civilian toll – UN human rights report

8 December – A new United Nations report out today has confirmed that Ukrainians living close to the “contact line” – the area between Government-controlled and armed group-controlled territory in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions – not only suffer due to fighting near their homes but also face the threat of landmines and unexploded ordinance as well as have to contend with severe restrictions on movement.

According to the Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine launched today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), between mid-August and mid-November, at least 32 civilians were killed in conflict-related incidents and another 132 injured. Between mid-April 2014 and 1 December this year, more than 2,000 civilians are estimated to have dined while an additional 298 were killed in the crash of Malaysian Airlines flight MH-17.

Conflict-related civilian injuries are estimated between 6,000 and 7,000.

“It is of deep concern that Government forces and armed groups operating in civilian areas do not take all feasible precautions against the effects of fighting, resulting in damage to schools, kindergartens, and medical facilities,” noted the report.

It added that it was worrying that Ukrainian military forces and armed groups continued to be positioned in civilian homes and buildings in villages and towns adjacent to the contact line.

The report also raised concern that armed groups in the self-proclaimed “Donetsk people’s republic” and “Luhansk people’s republic” continue to deprive people of their fundamental rights as well as of effective mechanism for redress.

Hundreds of individuals also remain missing.

While some of them could be dead with their bodies not yet recovered or identified, “some individuals considered missing by the Government may be held incommunicado in territories controlled by the armed groups or vice versa,” noted the report.

It also drew attention to a number of penal and pre-trial detention facilities in the armed group controlled and that despite repeated requests, UN human rights monitors were not allowed full and unhindered access, raising concern that those kept there may have been subjected to torture or sexual and gender-based violence.

Furthermore, disproportionate restrictions on freedom of movement across the contact line severely affect an average of 25,000 people per day, dividing families and communities.

The report also noted that agricultural land contaminated by landmines and other unexploded remnants of war had further aggravated the suffering of the population and those internally displaced continued to face challenges in availing of social security and pension payments.

New UN Human Rights report says total number of casualties in Ukraine since the conflict started close to 10,000. Photo: OHCHR
According to the UN human rights office, the total death toll from mid-April 2014 stands at 9,758 with another 22,779 people injured. These figures are estimates and comprise members of the Ukrainian armed forces, armed groups and civilians.

The impact of the conflict in eastern Ukraine on the human rights situation illustrates the need for the full implementation of the provisions of the Minsk Agreements, the report states.

**Myanmar must strengthen effort to diffuse tension in Myanmar**

– UN Special Adviser

According to a note to correspondents issued by the Office of the UN Spokesperson, the UN also said that authorities also need to take proactive measures to protect the local civilian population and allow humanitarian access to the areas of conflict. This call follows last month’s visit by nine local ambassadors, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, and various UN agencies who voiced their concerns after a trip to the Rakhine state last month.

Mr. Nambiar also supported former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his call for “unimpeded humanitarian and media access and strengthened efforts to defuse tensions and promote harmony” in the country.

“In the present situation, I feel that, while taking the necessary security measures to curb any fresh outbreak of attacks by criminal elements in the region, the authorities in Myanmar must also take steps to build confidence and reassurance among the local population that their security, dignity and well-being will be protected,” he stated.

He underscored that those who fled or suffered displacement should be allowed to return home and urged senior government leaders to send strong messages reiterating their determination to protect residents regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, or otherwise.

“In this volatile situation,” he warned, “it is everyone’s responsibility to handle allegations and rumours with great care.”

While Mr. Nambiar believes that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi “hears and understands the concerns of the international community,” he nonetheless expressed discontent over the refusal of authorities to take a stronger stance against hardliners as well as in their decision to act defensively rather than proactively with regards to the local population’s security.

“People of all communities in Myanmar must jointly oppose the violence, disunity, and division that are being instigated by a small group of criminal elements in the region. I also appeal to Daw Suu to visit Maungdaw and Buthidaung and reassure the civilian population there that they will be protected.”

He reminded correspondents of her promise to address the root causes of the crisis – namely, citizenship and status – and said that reiterating her commitment “would go a long way to relieve tension and promote realistic and sustainable solutions.”

Mr. Nambiar also spoke of the growing tensions in Shan and Kachin, states in north-eastern Myanmar that have seen confrontations between the military and ethnic armed groups, which have resulted in loss of human life, a destabilized local population, the impediment of peace, and breakdown of confidence and trust – all of which were built up over the past five

\[\text{Ethnic Rakhine people shelter in a stadium in Sittwe. Photo: Joe Freeman/IRIN}\]
years of ceasefire negotiations between the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team and the Union Peacemaking Working Committee.

“It is the responsibility of all parties to exercise restraint and avoid actions that can reverse the gains of the peace process so far. I call upon all parties, groups and stakeholders to engage in urgent consultations to defuse the situation and get back to the negotiating table,” he said.

**UN refugee agency reshapes protection ‘toolkit’ for a world on the move**

8 December – The United Nations refugee agency has updated its ‘toolkit’ for protecting vulnerable people on the move, in response to a sharp increase in global flows of both refugees and migrants in the decade since it was published.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued its original 10-point plan of action in 2006.

“What this 10-point plan on mixed movements does is collect practices, good examples, and ways and means to deal with the phenomenon of human mobility in all its dimensions – in its refugee dimension, but also its migratory dimension,” said UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Volker Türk.

Mr. Türk noted that, since 2006, the number of people on the move worldwide as a result of conflict, violence and persecution has roughly doubled to 65 million, including over 21 million refugees.

The updated plan takes into account larger and more complex flows of people in today’s world, such as an increase in the number of people seeking safety beyond the countries of first asylum – in Europe, and other parts of the world such as the Northern Triangle of Central America, and Southeast Asia – and the growing use of smuggling and trafficking routes by mixed flows of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants.

“It is clear that countries and organizations such as UNHCR and NGOs [non-governmental organizations] will have to deal with these new realities,” Türk said. “The 10-point plan shows practically, on the basis of over 100 new examples that were added to make the case, that indeed you can manage and address these phenomena,” he added.

It provides a “nuts and bolts” approach to help states and humanitarian workers identify vulnerable people on the move and in need of international protection, and respond appropriately to their needs, Türk said.
UN rights expert calls on countries to comply with laws that protect environment defenders

8 December – Governments must abide by the existing laws that protect indigenous and local communities who are stewards of key natural resources from which all humankind benefits, a United Nations human rights expert told the UN Conference on Biological Diversity today.

“The law is clear. Governments do have obligations to protect the environment and human rights. The norms themselves are fairly well established, but there is an implementation gap,” said John Knox, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment at an event being held on the sidelines of the 13th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), also known as COP 13, in Cancun, Mexico.

“The laws exist, but the problem is that many governments simply do not comply with their obligations towards indigenous peoples. They don't do enough to protect and promote their rights,” he added.

Mr. Knox also noted that governments should also respect the rights of local communities that are not indigenous groups. He stressed that these communities need to be consulted and should participate in decision-making that affects them, but pointed out that many times they are marginalized.

“The law for non-indigenous local communities can sometimes be unclear because their rights are not as clearly set out in binding instruments and this creates problems,” he said, adding that this issue would be featured in his next report to the Human Rights Council. “Their livelihood, subsistence and territories should not be taken away.”

Mr. Knox was speaking at a side event where various experts highlighted the crucial role that indigenous peoples and local communities play in conserving biodiversity. Their traditional knowledge and skills is considered invaluable in ensuring food security, creating medicines, and sustainably managing the world’s resources.

He emphasized that while it makes social and economic sense to protect this communities, governments should also do this because it is the law.

In addition, he highlighted the need to protect the rights of indigenous and local communities that are opposing projects supported by their governments, adding that more than 100 have been killed this year alone defending their land and resources.

“We're really living through a global crisis when it comes to protecting the rights of environmental defenders,” he said. “It is simply unacceptable that we’re doing a terrible job in protecting the lives of those protecting the environment of which all of our lives depend on.”

He added that international organizations and civil society must amplify their voices and work together to shine a light on the plight of these communities.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.
UN agencies sign agreement on purchasing ‘greener’ health commodities

8 December – The World Health Organization (WHO) has joined other United Nations and international agencies in a new agreement that will lead to more environmentally and socially sustainable procurement of health commodities.

“We need to make sure that when international organizations procure health commodities, we promote responsible consumption and production patterns and support the Sustainable Development Goals,” said Margaret Chan, Director-General of WHO as she signed the joint statement in Geneva on Wednesday.

Each year, WHO and its affiliate agencies collect some $3 billion in health commodities, including large amounts of generic anti-retroviral therapies (ARTs), anti-Malaria drugs and insecticide-impregnated bednets, anti-tuberculosis medicines, condoms, and a variety of vaccines. These are in addition to medical and laboratory equipment.

Procurement activities that promote efficient use of materials, reduce waste, and prioritize products with low carbon footprints are an important means to create cost savings and ensure that the health sector is aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The new agreement is a signal to suppliers and manufacturers that purchasers, particularly those in the international health development sector, will increasingly look for environmentally and socially sourced health commodities.

Going forward, WHO and other signatories will incorporate the commitment as a means to advance their standard practices with suppliers and manufacturers, as well as to improve their institutional strategies and policies.

UN agriculture agency to support land reforms at core of Colombia’s new peace deal

8 December – On behalf of millions of Colombian farmers affected by the violent conflict that plagued the Latin American country for more than 50 years, a comprehensive rural reform, aimed at strengthening food security and peace, including measures which address issues of land access and restitution will be supported by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

“There is no peace without sustainable development, and there is no sustainable development without peace, emphasizing that both have a fundamental precondition: that all citizens have access to a dignified life and food necessary to lead a dignified life,” FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva said yesterday in a news release.

The Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP), the main opposition group, have agreed an historic peace accord meant to end the Western Hemisphere's longest running conflict. That deal was the culmination of four years of talks between the two sides, and led to a cessation of hostilities and agreements on key issues such as political participation, illicit drugs and victims' rights, transitional justice and land rights, which was the focus of a
parallel event at a meeting of the FAO Council.

Mr. Graziano da Silva stressed that "the peace agreement, proposes a profound change in the rural areas of the country. It will enable production to diversify, improve incomes and promote governance of land and natural resource tenure."

FAO’s support to the peace accord’s land reform plank is based on the agency’s Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure, assisting the government of Colombia on safeguarding people's rights to property or access to land, forests and fisheries, which has been one of the topics of the peace agreement.

The UN agriculture agency will also offer its expertise by monitoring and evaluating of Colombia’s social protection programmes. These programmes will be linked to family farming through public procurement.

Civil society and institutions that have been "historically far from the State" will have to be involved, according to Mr. da Silva, for reforms to be effective.

He added that FAO has accumulated a great amount of experience in these areas that it can offer to the Colombian Government.

At the FAO event, the Colombian Ambassador to Italy stressed that the Latin American country has more than 20 million hectares of arable land, only seven million hectares of which are planted.

Ambassador Juan Mesa Zuleta said that Colombia is among the seven countries of the world "that can best contribute" to ending world hunger, adding that the transcontinental country itself imports food from the world that “we could plant on our own soil”.

Libya: Security Council reaffirms full support for political agreement signed a year ago

8 December – Expressing deep concern over the serious political polarization resulting in a deterioration of the security, economic and humanitarian situation in Libya, the Security Council today reiterated its support for the United Nations envoy for Libya, who leads efforts in facilitating implementation of the political agreement signed about a year ago.

Issuing a press statement overnight, the 15-member Council also reiterated support for efforts of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and encouraged the envoy and the Mission to intensify their efforts in facilitating implementation of the Libyan Political Agreement.

The release of the statement followed the briefing on 6 December by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Martin Kobler, who noted that implementation of the political deal has stalled.

The Agreement rests on four main principles: ensuring the democratic rights of the Libyan people, the need for a consensual government based on the principle of the separation of powers, oversight and balance between them, as well as the need to empower state institutions like the Government of National Accord so that they can address the serious challenges ahead, respect for the Libyan judiciary and its independence.

In the press statement, the Council expressed its deep concern over the challenging political and security context in Libya and the serious political polarization resulting in a deterioration of the security, economic and humanitarian situation as well as the recent escalation of violence between armed groups in Tripoli, calling on all parties to immediately heed the
Presidency Council’s appeal to cease fighting.

Reaffirming full support for the Agreement and calling on all parties to accelerate its implementation, the Council reiterated the importance of the continued inclusiveness of the Agreement and renewed its strong call on all parties in Libya to be part of and to engage constructively with the Agreement in good faith and with sustained political will.

The Council urged all Libyan stakeholders, especially those not currently fully engaged in the process, to work together with the Presidency Council to resolve outstanding issues and focus all Libyan efforts on rebuilding the country.

The Council reiterated its grave concern about the terrorist threat in Libya, in particular from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh), groups proclaiming allegiance to ISIL, and groups affiliated with Al-Qaida, welcomed progress made in the fight against terrorist groups, notably against ISIL, in Sirte and in Benghazi, and noted with concern the information that ISIL elements may have dispersed to other parts of the country.

The Council also urged Libyans across the political and security divide to unite and join forces under unified command in their fight against ISIL in the service of their country and called on armed actors to halt violence against civilians.

The Council reaffirmed its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya.