UN chief presents Security Council with special measures to curb sexual exploitation

10 March – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today presented to the Security Council special measures aimed at ending impunity, helping and supporting victims, and strengthening accountability as part of a more effective collective response to sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel.

“I am determined that the United Nations must lead by example. Sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel demands nothing less than decisive, bold action,” the Secretary-General told the 15-member body.

He underlined that sexual exploitation “is a global issue” and “is not confined to any one region, mission or nation.”

In his briefing, Mr. Ban stressed his strong commitment “to working with Member States to confront this criminal conduct, and to justify the trust of the people we serve, to ensure that this Organization remains a beacon of hope for the most vulnerable.”

Special measures

The Secretary-General’s report, which was made public on Friday, lists for the first time the names of the countries of
alleged perpetrators, a measure meant to end impunity by increasing transparency.

The report shows an increase in the number of new allegations in 2015, with 69 of the total 99 allegations lodged against UN personnel serving in peace operations.

The UN is finalizing the establishment of a trust fund that will provide the victims, many of whom are children, with medical, psychosocial and legal services.

In his briefing to the Council, Mr. Ban encouraged Member States to make voluntary contributions to the fund. States have also been asked to approve the transfer to the trust fund of payments that will be withheld in substantiated cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Troop- and police-contributing countries have also been urged to designate paternity focal points, who will follow up “vigorously” to ensure that children borne of these abuses received the necessary support, Mr. Ban said.

“Member States must also consider how they will respond to claims from victims who pursue legal action to seek redress,” he noted.

The UN is also calling for the development of “uniformly high standards of investigation” and the creation of immediate response teams to gather and preserve evidence.

“All investigations should be concluded within six months at most, with the most urgent cases concluded within three months,” Mr. Ban said, urging Member States to adopt this standard and to cooperate with the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in the conduct of investigations.

**Monitoring accountability**

Mr. Ban underscored to the Council his strong commitment to monitoring accountability for violations.

“Where appropriate, this will include taking action up to and including the repatriation of commanders, or of whole contingents,” he stated.

This has already been put into practice in the Central African Republic (CAR), where troops have been repatriated due to alleged sexual exploitation and abuse.

“I will also consider ending the deployment of uniformed personnel from specific Member States if there is prima facie evidence of widespread or systemic exploitation and abuse,” Mr. Ban warned.

He stressed that accountability demands that Member States bring to justice the perpetrators, as a matter of responsibility.

These proposed measures also include on-site court martial proceedings, collection of DNA samples of alleged perpetrators, and domestic legislation that can be applicable to sex crimes committed by nationals serving in UN peace operations.

“We cannot ensure the application of the principle of responsibility, including criminal responsibility, unless countries contributing troops and police personnel quickly and thoroughly investigate such allegations and the perpetrators are duly punished,” Mr. Ban said.

**Emphasizing prevention**

In parallel to the punitive measures, the Secretary-General said that the UN will continue to emphasize prevention. This includes increasing support for pre-deployment training by Member States, including for the first time, the ability to vet all uniformed personnel for previous allegations of misconduct while in the service of the Organization.
The UN is also considering imposing new rules to limit the social activities of peacekeeping contingents, including the designation of certain areas as “out-of-bounds.”

The report presented to the Council today follows the report released in December 2015 by an independent panel which reviewed the UN response to allegations of crimes committed against children by soldiers – not under UN command – sent to CAR.

Mr. Ban pledged to urgently study the recommendations set forth by the independent panel. As part of an immediate set of response measures, he appointed Jane Holl Lute as his Special Coordinator on improving the UN response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

**Following missile launch, Ban calls on Iran not to increase tensions through ‘hasty actions’**

*10 March* – Following yesterday’s ballistic missile launch conducted by Iran, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on the Government “to act with moderation, caution and the good sense not to increase tensions through any hasty actions.”

In January, Security Council sanctions previously imposed on Iran through resolution 2231 (2015) were terminated following the release of a report by inspectors from the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The report confirmed the country had completed necessary preparatory steps to start the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action aimed at resolving the nuclear issue.

“In that resolution, the Secretary-General notes, the Council called upon Iran not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson.

“The Secretary-General also notes that it is for the Security Council to examine information regarding resolution 2231 (2015),” it added, noting that the UN chief urges all concerned to act with restraint.

**UN rights chief calls on EU to adopt more ‘humane’ measures on migration**

*10 March* – The United Nations human rights chief today reiterated his profound concern about the situation faced by refugees and migrants “in extreme vulnerability,” and urged the European Union to adopt a more humane set of measures on migration at a summit next week.

“In the first two months of this year, more than 400 people have died trying to reach Europe – due partly to the lack of viable avenues of entry,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein told the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

“I acknowledge the generosity with which Germany welcomed around a million people last year, and the efforts of Greece, throughout 2015, to take a humane approach, avoiding detention and pushbacks at sea. But today, in violation of the fundamental principles of solidarity,
human dignity, and human rights, the race to repel these people is picking up momentum,” he warned, as he presented his annual report.

The High Commissioner said the EU’s draft arrangement with Turkey – discussed earlier this week – raises a number of very serious issues, which he intends to address during a visit to Brussels before a two-day EU Summit beginning on 17 March.

“Among my concerns is the potential for collective and arbitrary expulsions, which are illegal. Border restrictions which do not permit determination of the circumstances of each individual violate international and European law,” he stressed. “I urge the EU to adopt a much more rights-compliant and humane set of measures on migration at next week's summit. International guarantees protecting human rights may not be side-stepped or diluted.”

The High Commissioner’s speech, which outlined concerns about almost 60 countries and human rights topics, highlighted the risk of cosmetic "human rights window-dressing” with no real implementation on the ground.

“The ratification of treaties and agreements, and acceptance of recommendations stemming from UN human rights mechanisms, are not in themselves human rights achievements. There needs to be follow-up and real change to bring greater freedoms and dignity to the people,” he insisted.

He also made a plea for better financing, noting that to respond to all requests for assistance from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), $217 million more would be required on top of the regular budget, while the expected extra-budgetary cost plan is $130 million.

“The gap between those two numbers represents people that we cannot help; field offices that we cannot open; facts that we cannot establish; and victims that we cannot assist or represent. Programmes which will not show law-enforcement personnel how they can interrogate people without using torture; and other programmes which could have helped judges, prison wardens, development officials, legislators, policy makers and many others integrate international human rights law into their work,” he explained, adding that the cost of not doing that work is “bitterly high.”

Turning to the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by UN peacekeepers, particularly in the Central African Republic, the High Commissioner said only Member States can act to end impunity for criminal offences that have been committed by their nationals who work for the UN, as the Organization cannot exercise criminal jurisdiction.

“Member States also have responsibility for investigating and prosecuting UN civilian personnel in peacekeeping environments where the judicial system is unable to do so,” he underlined. “For States whose laws do not allow them to prosecute their nationals for offences committed in other countries, the UN, ten years ago, proposed a draft convention. That draft convention is still there. You, the Member States, should now adopt it.”

He added that every time the UN announces allegations before the press – together with the nationality of the military or civilian staff concerned – he would like also to see the ambassadors of their countries assume their responsibilities and join the press conference.
UN and African Union condemn ambush on peacekeepers in Darfur

10 March – The United Nations and the African Union have condemned Wednesday’s attack by an unknown armed group that killed one South African peacekeeper and injured another in Sudan’s Darfur region.

In a joint statement issued today by their spokespeople, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and AU Commission Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma also expressed their sincere condolences to the family of the fallen peacekeeper and to the Government of South Africa, wishing the wounded a full and speedy recovery.

“The Chairperson and the Secretary-General call on the parties to the conflict in Darfur to respect the integrity of the peacekeeping force. They urge the Sudanese authorities to investigate the attack promptly and bring the perpetrators to justice,” the statement added.

The attack took place 40 kilometres southwest of Kutum, North Darfur, while the peacekeepers from the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) were travelling from Kutum to Djarido.

In a statement issued to the press, the UN Security Council condemned the attack “in the strongest terms,” and called on the Sudanese Government to swiftly conduct a full investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice.

It also underlined that attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law.

UN expert urges Honduran Government to protect witness to Berta Cáceres killing

10 March – In the wake of the assassination of human rights activist Berta Cáceres in Honduras, an independent United Nations human rights expert is calling on the Government in that country to ensure the safety and protection of a second activist who witnessed the killing and was injured during the attack.

Gustavo Castro Soto, a Mexican national, is the founder of the organization Otros Mundos and defender of land and environmental rights. He has been blocked from leaving Honduras for 30 days due to a “migratory alert,” despite assistance from the Mexican Embassy in Tegucigalpa.

“I urge the authorities of Honduras to guarantee that the life of Mr. Castro Soto is not put to risk and to allow his return to Mexico as soon as possible,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst.

He also called for “an immediate, independent and impartial investigation” into the death of Ms. Cáceres, who was shot on 3 March in her home in the city of La Esperanza, western Honduras.
According to a press release by UN Women, Ms. Cáceres was a staunch defender of the rights of indigenous peoples, and had been receiving threats for her stance against hydroelectric construction projects on land sacred to the Lenca people in western Honduras.

In today’s statement, Mr. Forst called the assassination “a tragic wake-up call” for the Government to prevent such murders, protect human rights defenders, and hold perpetrators to account.

“It is high time that the Government of Honduras addressed the flagrant impunity of the increased number of executions of human rights defenders in the country, especially targeting those who defend environmental and land rights,” Mr. Forst stressed.

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.

**Missile firing prompts UN chief to call on DPR Korea to stop ‘destabilising acts’**

10 March – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon “remains gravely concerned” by the situation on the Korean Peninsula following today’s missile launch by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), his spokesman said.

“He once again calls on DPRK to return to full compliance with relevant Security Council resolutions and cease destabilising acts, such as today’s launch of two missiles,” Stéphane Dujarric told reporters at UN Headquarters.

“We are also closely following developments and staying in touch with all interested parties, and we reaffirm the Secretary-General’s commitment to work for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula,” the spokesman added.

Just over a week ago, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution that imposes new sanctions and tightens some of its existing measures against DPRK, due to the country's ongoing nuclear and ballistic missile-related activities that the Council said “threaten international peace and security.”
As 'most disaster-prone region,' Asia-Pacific needs risk-sensitive development, UN reports

10 March – The Asia-Pacific region continued to be the world's most disaster-prone region in 2015, requiring a paradigm shift from a response-recovery governance to a risk-sensitive development approach, according to a new United Nations report.

The region accounted for over half the world's 344 disasters in 2015, resulting in over 16,000 deaths with 59 million people affected, and the cost of economic damage was more than US$45 billion, excluding indirect losses, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) said in a news release.

South Asia was the hardest hit, recording 52 disasters and more than 14,000 deaths, with most deaths attributed to the 7.6 magnitude earthquake that hit Nepal in April.

Titled “Disasters in Asia and the Pacific: 2015 Year in Review,” the report warns that the region's burgeoning cities may not be adequately equipped to tackle urban disasters that occur more frequently and with greater intensity. Over 700 million people in the region live in cities at 'extreme' or 'high' disaster risk, and by 2030 this number could reach one billion.

In many big cities in Asia-Pacific much of the infrastructure is outdated and built without adequate attention to disaster resilience, the report notes.

Last year, the urban centres of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Japan were affected by severe floods, while Nepal's capital city, Kathmandu, bore the brunt of the economic damage from the April earthquake.

Ecological buffers depleted by unplanned urbanization

Widespread floods in Chennai, India in December 2015 illustrate the common challenges faced by many big cities. With the ecological buffers depleted over time by rapid, unplanned urbanization, the floods inundated critical infrastructure, disrupted power networks and waterlogged major city roads. Economic damage and loss from the floods have been estimated at more than US$10 billion.

According to the report, a prolonged El Niño phenomenon last year drew attention to neglected and often forgotten slow-onset disasters by severely exacerbating effects of heat waves, forest fires, haze, and droughts. Last year was the hottest on record, with Pakistan and India reporting more than 3,400 fatalities from a searing heatwave.

Drought caused serious water and food shortages in much of South and South-East Asia and several fatalities in the Pacific. Rather than dealing with the drought only when it becomes an emergency, it should be addressed from a long-term perspective to protect livelihoods.

Use of drones for disaster management

To build a resilient Asia-Pacific, the report further calls for increased focus on risk-sensitive development, and stronger regional cooperation for managing trans-boundary disasters. It advocates capitalizing on emerging technologies such as unmanned aerial vehicles for disaster management but stresses the need to establish regulatory standards for effective use of these technologies.

The report, commending the “Zero Casualty” policy implemented in Philippines as a regional good practice, concludes that...
disaster risk reduction cannot be achieved without political will and effective leadership at all levels of government.

**UN: cooperation among judges vital to counter-terrorism efforts, human rights protection**

10 March – Formal cooperation among judges is essential in bringing individuals charged with terrorism-related crimes to justice and ensuring that the rule of law is upheld throughout the process, according to officials at a United Nations event that for the first time brought together Supreme Court justices to discuss how terrorism cases are handled in their respective countries.

“Judges play a crucial role in interpreting counter-terrorism measures and promoting counter-terrorism measures within the human rights and legal frameworks,” UN Chef de Cabinet Edmond Mulet said in his opening statement to today’s event, entitled “The Effective Adjudication of Terrorism Cases.”

“Member States must ensure that they provide access to justice for all and work to strengthen institutions, including the judicial,” he told the event, organized by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED).

He stressed the importance of “effective, accountable and inclusive” justice not only for the victims and the perpetrators, but also for ensuring public confidence in the judicial process.

He pledged the UN’s commitment to strengthening support to these efforts, telling the judges that “ultimately it is your work at the local, national and regional levels that will have the most impact.”

United States Supreme Court Associate Justice Stephen Breyer provided an overview framing the issues that would be discussed in an interactive panel, namely the role of the country’s top judiciary during times of conflict.

Echoing the idea that greater cooperation is useful between judicial representatives, he characterized being a judge as “not a gregarious job; it is a rather lonely job.”

He began by quoting the Roman philosopher, Marcus Tullius Cicero, who said: “In times of war, the law falls silent.” He then noted some key judicial moments from US history, including political and social challenges when the Supreme Court’s decisions were ignored, such as immediately after the 1954 landmark case on racial segregation, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.

In the context of war and anti-terrorism measures, the top court cannot write the government a blank check, the Justice said, before asking – then what colour is the check? How is this done in different Supreme Courts? And how do you create a rule of law where people agree to do it?

Speaking of his experience in Afghanistan, Supreme Court Justice Abdul Rasheed Rashid discussed the physical security threats facing judges in his country, and praised the people of Afghanistan for being “really courageous even if the kind of terrorism we have here is one of the worst.”

Justices from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan also participated. From Pakistan, Justice Asif Khosa, stressed that the main principle of a judge is to be fair, irrespective if the perpetrator is alleged to be a terrorist or a more common criminal.

“In the name of terrorism, I cannot brutalize justice,” he said.

The discussion was held under the umbrella of CTED’s cooperation with the Global Center on Cooperative Security and the
South Asia Judges Project, which consists of a series of workshops for judges, attended by representatives of all member States of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) [Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka], as well as by prosecutors and police officers from all the SAARC countries.

In the second half of the event, judicial representatives discussed the cooperation and support necessary to support senior judges in leading a criminal justice response to terrorism.

One of the main issues that evolved was that terrorists should not be able to take advantage of legal loopholes or differences between jurisdictions in a country or between countries, in order to absolve themselves of wrongdoing.

The speakers included Chief Justice Jean Fahed, Court of Cassation of Lebanon; Chief Justice Khaled Ayari, Court of Cassation of Tunisia; and Justice Mohamed Reda Hussein, Vice-President, Court of Cassation of Egypt.

In his closing remarks, Jean-Paul Laborde, the Executive Director of CTED, said today's event would be a first step in giving Supreme Court justices access to the global institution so that they can continue to become familiar with the international challenges and debates.

“These connections between the diplomatic and judicial world are essential for the future of our fight against terrorism and for our fight against all forms of international crime,” Mr. Laborde said.

He noted that judges need to be able to stay abreast of the flexibility and the speed of action of these terrorist organizations, to be fully aware of the type of response that needs to be provided at the judiciary level.

“We in the Security Council and the CTC [Counter-Terrorism Committee] need to raise our voice and give judges this ability to administer justice, to be able to speak with States, to be able to take action against these situations,” he added.

**Cultural goods remain economic driver in digital age – UNESCO report**

10 March – A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report launched today finds that the trade in cultural goods doubled from 2004 to 2013 despite a global recession and a massive shift among consumers of movies and music towards web-based services.

The study from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), The Globalisation of Cultural Trade: A Shift in Cultural Consumption–International flows of cultural goods and services 2004-2013, takes an in-depth look at the export and import of cultural goods and services around the world.

“Trade in cultural goods totalled $212.8 billion in 2013, nearly double the amount in 2004,” said Silvia Montoya, Director of the UIS, in press release. “This is further evidence of the critical role cultural industries play in today’s global economy.”

UNESCO found that China is now the lead exporter of cultural goods, followed by the United States. In 2013, the total value of China’s cultural exports was $60.1 billion – more than double that of the US at $27.9 billion.

While the US has lost its position as the top exporter of cultural goods, it reportedly remains the top importer of these goods. In general, developed countries play a smaller role in cultural exports, but still dominate imports. Meanwhile, emerging markets are growing their exports of cultural goods. Turkey and India strengthened their position in recent years, joining the world’s top 10 exporters of cultural goods.
**Products gaining ground**

Art and crafts have moved up in the ranking of the ten most traded cultural goods, fuelled by gold jewellery – a safe harbour in uncertain times. Gold jewellery exports represented more than $100 billion in 2013.

Statues, statuettes and paintings also gained ground. Their share of the trade in art and crafts was worth $19 billion in 2013.

**Products losing ground**

From 2004 to 2013, the “dematerialisation,” or the digitisation of products, such as music, movies and newspapers, had an enormous impact on these industries, as their products moved into the realm of cultural services, often sold as web-based subscriptions.

Trade in recorded music products, for example, declined by 27 per cent from 2004 to 2013, and trade in movies fell by 88 per cent during the same period; however, audio-visual services as a whole steadily gained ground.

Despite the downturn in the trade of print products, reflected by the decline in newspapers, books held their ground as an important cultural export in some regions, growing by 20 per cent from 2004 to 2013.

**The measurement challenge**

As more and more cultural goods move from the tangible to the digital, the report notes that obtaining accurate data on the flow of these goods is becoming more challenging. Finding new sources of data and cooperation between international organizations in the promotion and improvement of cultural trade statistics, especially in the developing world, will help improve the understanding of the real contribution of the trade in cultural goods to the global economy.

**Tajik restrictions on opposition, civil society, media ‘eroding’ rights, says UN expert**

10 March – An independent United Nations human rights expert today voiced concern over the increasing Government restrictions on opposition parties, civil society and the media over the past year in Tajikistan.

“The people of Tajikistan enjoy fundamental protections under their Constitution and human rights law, but those protections are eroding as the Government punishes dissent, limits access to alternative voices in the media and online, and shrinks the space for civil society,” David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, said at the end of a week-long official visit to the Central Asian country.

The expert voiced particular concern over the recent ban of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and the prosecution of at least 13 of its leaders in secret trials.

“The Government accuses the IRPT and its members of serious crimes, but it has refused to give public access to the trial and evidence,” Mr. Kaye said, urging the Government to release all persons detained on political grounds and ensure due process and a fair trial.

He also drew attention to the attacks on members of Group 24 and other independent politicians. Criminal cases have also been brought against lawyers defending opposition leaders, and other critical voices also reported harassment.
During his visit, the expert received numerous reports from journalists of pressure to refrain from covering issues of public interest, especially those related to the political environment. The Government raised its national security concerns, which are grounds of concern for any government, he said.

“Yet banning peaceful political opposition forces and harassing lawyers, journalists and activists undermine security and generate tensions and long-term instability,” he pointed out.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also reported a deterioration of the space for their work. “New amendments to the Law on Public Association pertaining to foreign funds place a burden on many NGOs,” Mr. Kaye said.

On the blocking of websites and networks, including mobile services, the Special Rapporteur underscored that these measures are disproportionate and incompatible with international standards, urging Parliament to consider adopting legislation that would impose restrictions on the Government’s ability to block the Internet and mobile communications.

“Tajikistan maintains a very good and open dialogue with various human rights mechanisms,” he said, underlining his intention to work further with the Tajik Government to improve the legal and political environment for fundamental rights.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the 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.

**Upcoming UN forum to focus on women’s empowerment, sustainable development**

**10 March** – Advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, will be the focus of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which begins its 60th session in New York next week.

“It will be a festival of ideas channelled to implementation,” Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women Executive Director, told journalists, briefing alongside Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, Ambassador of Brazil and Chair of the Commission’s Bureau.

“We want to make sure we balance between [the] greatest challenges that we face and the greatest opportunities,” Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said, referring to the multitude of topics that will be covered in the more than 400 events planned throughout the city.

The CSW, which will begin on Monday and last through 24 March, will bring together representatives from the UN system, Member States, and civil society from around the world to review the progress so far towards gender equality and women’s empowerment and plan new initiatives and actions.

The priority theme for the events will be on women’s empowerment and sustainable development, given that this is the first session of the Commission since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015. The Agenda includes a stand-alone goal on women’s empowerment and participation.

“CSW has already been working under the framework of universal applicability,” Mr. Patriota said. “No single country, however developed, has achieved full gender equality, a reminder of the universal challenge we face in promoting gender equality.”

The Commission will build on the leaders’ forum in September 2015 when more than 90 world leaders answered UN
Women’s call for action to “Step It Up for Gender Equality” by pledging specific actions to tackle barriers to gender equality.

These include women’s economic inclusion, protection from violence, and support in areas where women and girls are on the frontlines – such as with climate change or the Zika virus outbreak.

Ahead of the start of the CSW, a youth forum has been organized on Saturday by UN Women, the UN Inter-agency Network on Youth Development's Working Group on Youth and Gender Equality and partners.

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said the Forum would provide an “historic opportunity for young people to come together and advocate for issues that affect them.” The conclusions of the forum will be shared at CSW’s political discussions.