Hurricane’s impact on political process in Haiti reaffirms need to extend peackeeping mission – UN envoy

11 October – With Haiti facing the dual challenges of addressing the impact of Hurricane Matthew and restarting preparations for the holding of the much-anticipated elections, the United Nations envoy for the Caribbean country today expressed support for the recommended extension of the UN mission there by six months until mid-April 2017.

“I call on all of Haiti’s international partners to continue to lend your support to the country to rapidly overcome the new challenges occasioned by the hurricane so that focus of all can be returned to strengthening the country’s economic, physical and institutional infrastructure,” said Sandra Honoré, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Haiti, during a Security Council debate on the UN’s mandate in the country.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is recommending that the UN Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH) be extended for six months at the current force and police strength.

“This will allow MINUSTAH to support the Haitian authorities in their efforts to return to full constitutional order amidst the humanitarian crisis created by Hurricane Matthew,” Ms. Honoré said.

She noted that MINUSTAH’s civilian and uniformed personnel and capacities are being put to full use in support of the humanitarian efforts, by opening up access to roads, providing airlift and supporting the Haitian National Police in securing...
humanitarian workers and stocks, among other tasks.

She went on to highlight that not only did Hurricane Matthew bring destruction to Haiti, it has also affected the country’s political outlook, rendering impossible the holding on 9 October of the presidential elections repeated from last year, as well as the partial senatorial elections and legislative reruns.

The Provisional Electoral Council has postponed the elections, pending completion of an assessment of the hurricane’s impact on the electoral process, she said. Preliminary reports indicate that at least 70 per cent of voting centres may have been affected in the South department, and even more in Grand’Anse, where many areas are still inaccessible, she added.

Prior to the disruption caused by the hurricane, which made landfall on 4 October, technical preparations had largely been on track for the holding of the elections, she said, noting that most political actors were committed to renewing the country’s key democratic institutions through elections as a crucial first step toward Haiti’s return to constitutional order, following the extended period of transitional governance.

“No political party had boycotted the process, and the large number of registered candidates and parties reflected a broad participation of actors across the political spectrum, setting the stage for an inclusive electoral process,” she said.

*Haiti’s ownership of electoral process is a promising sign for its future*

The commitment shown by the Haitian authorities to own the electoral process, including financial and operational aspects, is a promising sign for the country’s future, especially given the eventual drawdown of MINUSTAH, the Special Representative said.

She emphasized that while the Provisional Electoral Council is preparing to announce a new electoral calendar, it is important to find the right balance to maintain the momentum generated for elections and to take into account the technical and political considerations, while facing the largest humanitarian crisis that Haiti has known since 2010.

Despite the imperative need for all actors to focus on the emergency response, they cannot lose sight of the longer term challenges and priorities, such as strengthening the rule of law institutions and most notably the Haitian National Police, which has yet to become operationally independent to fully provide for security throughout the country, she stressed.

Work on the new five-year development strategy is reaching its final stages, determining objectives with respect to the required police-to-population ratio and identifying areas in which continuous specialized support is needed for further institutional and operational improvement of the national police, she said.

*‘This is a humanitarian tragedy and an acute emergency situation’*

Detailing the damage brought by the storm, she reported that more than 2.1 million people are estimated to have been affected, with more than 1.4 million in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The Ministry of the Interior has confirmed 372 deaths, a figure that is likely to rise, while more than 60,000 people have been evacuated and remain in temporary shelters.

Though the full extent of the physical damage is still being assessed by the Government, “This is a humanitarian tragedy and an acute emergency situation,” she warned.

There are hundreds of suspected cholera cases, and we are already seeing the first deaths

The health impact of this disaster cannot be overestimated. “The absence of drinking water and the contamination by sewage of other available water, is causing a very high level of infections from diarrheal disease, including but not exclusively, cholera,” she said. “There are hundreds of suspected cholera cases, and we are already seeing the first deaths.”

Protecting vulnerable populations from cholera, and ensuring that the restoration, and in some cases the installation, of water and sanitation systems has to be one of the priorities for humanitarian action, she said.
Regarding a flash appeal for $120 million announced yesterday by the UN and partners, she called on all Member States to contribute urgently to the appeal, in support of the response being led by the Government to meet the needs of 750,000 people for the next three months.

**Political polarization in DR Congo may spark ‘large-scale violence,’ UN envoy warns Security Council**

*11 October* – Warning of an extremely fragile political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where “actors on all sides appear more and more willing to resort to violence to achieve their ends,” the top United Nations official in the country called today on the Security Council to urge the parties to return to dialogue, guarantee the right to peaceful opposition and to end impunity for violence.

“The tipping point towards grave violence could arrive very rapidly,” said Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). “I believe the Council must remain actively seized of the situation,” also encouraging regional organizations to engage more closely with the situation.

Briefing the Council on the Secretary-General’s latest report on the situation, Mr. Sidikou expressed deep concerns about the impasse in the electoral process, rising political tensions and related violence in the country, and underlined the primary responsibility of the Government and all stakeholders “to preserve the hard-won gains made in recent years.”

Recalling that in September, after a group of opposition parties called the Rassemblement boycotted the national dialogue despite the efforts of a facilitator named by the African Union, he said the Independent National Electoral Commission had announced that presidential elections would not be feasible until 18 November 2018, with completion of the voter registry by 31 July 2017.

That announcement, he said, triggered wide-spread condemnation by the opposition, who claimed that the Electoral Commission was being used to extend President Joseph Kabila’s incumbency beyond constitutional limits. The Rassemblement subsequently called for the President to step down by 19 December 2016.

“Against this backdrop of polarization,” Mr. Sidikou said that on 19 and 20 September, serious violence erupted following large-scale demonstrations in the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, and elsewhere, during which, the UN had confirmed, there were at least 49 civilians killed, 38 by gunshot, others burned alive or killed by machete. More than 140 were injured, with four officers allegedly killed by demonstrators. MONUSCO investigations, he said, had documented the involvement of both State and non-State actors.

In all this, the Mission has continued its call for restraint by all actors. Mr. Sidikou said he had personally raised concerns about the role of State violence with his Government interlocutors and had worked with the diplomatic community and civil society to build bridges between the parties. He also liaised closely with the Government on confidence-building measures to encourage dialogue, notably through the release of political prisoners and allowing media to operate without constraints.

The Mission has reinforced its presence in Kinshasa to bolster monitoring the political, security and human rights situation, he added.

“While much attention is currently focused on the political situation, I would like to highlight that the security situation in eastern DRC remains very worrying, characterized by severe protection of civilians risks to many communities,” he reported, adding that these tensions are only increasing through the electoral period. He also described MONUSCO’s civilian protection activities, including military operations against armed groups, based on what he called solid cooperation.
with the Congolese Armed Forces, known by the French acronym FARDC.

Also, in regard to the situation in the east, he reported that a precarious situation was created when more than 1,000 ex-combatants were returned to communities in the region as part of the demobilization and reintegration process, but before the Government and World Bank partners had adequately prepared the communities for their return, raising the possibilities of tensions and their return to armed groups.

Noting MONUSCO community violence-reduction programmes, Mr. Sidikou called for all partners to quickly put in place the necessary community reintegration measures to allow further returns to occur in a constructive manner.

He also appealed for greater support for humanitarian needs in the eastern part of the country, noting that population movements continue, refugees are arriving from South Sudan, epidemics loom and the 2016 appeal is only half funded. With regard to the overall situation of the country, he warned that, while MONUSCO would continue to do everything in its power to protect civilians, large-scale violence due to political polarization could be overwhelming. “The scope of the threats dramatically outstrips the Mission’s capabilities,” he said.

**UNICEF gears up to vaccinate 41 million children after polio outbreak in north-eastern Nigeria**

*11 October* – More than 41 million children are expected to get vaccinations against polio as part of a major new health campaign by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in the Lake Chad basin, aimed at the recent outbreak of polio in north-east Nigeria.

As such, the agency has deployed 39,000 health workers across Nigeria and neighbouring Chad, Niger, Cameroon and the Central African Republic to deliver the oral polio vaccine in areas at high-risk for the virus.

The spokesperson also stated that in addition to the 30 million children that have already been reached with vaccine during the first two rounds, the next round of the campaign is aimed at vaccinating 41 million children in the Lake Chad basin.

In Borno state, a malnutrition screening was provided as part of the vaccination drive, he continued, also noting that UNICEF vaccination teams are conducting the screenings to identify cases of severe acute malnutrition in children under five before referring malnourished children to treatment programmes.

“The immunization campaign is being delivered by national Governments, with support from UNICEF, the World Health Organization, Rotary International, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation,” said Mr. Boulierac.

Unfortunately, UNICEF’s response has been hampered by a lack of funding, and continued insecurity in the region. So far, only one third of the required sum for the emergency response has been received.

“As UNICEF and its partners have scaled up [the] response by using the campaign to also find out more about the occurrence of malnutrition and be able to treat it better, as new territories in northeast Nigeria had become newly accessible,” said Boulierac, referring to the regional effort, led by Nigeria to root out Boko Haram insurgents. He added that the first round of vaccination of this campaign began in August.
UNICEF reports 478,000 children under five with severe acute malnutrition in the Lake Chad basin area. In other north-eastern Nigeria states like Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, the number of children with severe malnutrition has reached 400,000.

**Taxing sugary drinks can curb global epidemic of obesity and diabetes – UN health agency**

11 October – Unhealthy diet accounts for more than 11 million deaths annually, with four million deaths due to obesity, the United Nations health agency said today, launching a new report that says taxing sugary drinks can yield major health benefits, such as reducing obesity, type 2 diabetes and tooth decay.

“If governments tax products like sugary drinks, they can reduce suffering and save lives” says Dr. Douglas Bettcher, Director of World health Organization’s (WHO) Department for the Prevention of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs), in a press release. “They can also cut healthcare costs and increase revenues to invest in health services,” he adds.

Launched on World Obesity Day, the new WHO report, Fiscal policies for Diet and Prevention of Noncommunicable Diseases, argues that fiscal policies that lead to at least a 20 per cent increase in the retail price of sugary drinks would result in proportional reductions in consumption of such products.

WHO says such reduced consumption would mean lower intake of “free sugars” and calories overall and improved nutrition, with fewer people suffering from overweight, obesity, diabetes and tooth decay.

Free sugars refer to monosaccharides – such as glucose or fructose – and disaccharides – such as sucrose or table sugar – added to food and drinks by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, along with sugars naturally present in honey, syrups and fruit juices and concentrates.

**Obesity on the rise**

“Consumption of free sugars, including products like sugary drinks, is a major factor in the global increase of people suffering from obesity and diabetes,” emphasized Dr. Bettcher.

Between 1980 and 2014, global prevalence of obesity more than doubled with greater than half a billion adults – 11 per cent of men and 15 per cent of women – being classified as obese. In 2014, more than one in three, or 39 per cent of adults worldwide aged 18 and older, were overweight.

At a press conference at WHO headquarters in Geneva on the launch of the report, Dr. Francesco Branca, Director of the agency’s Department of Nutrition for Health and Development, described obesity, overweight and diabetes as major global heath challenges. “Largely due to unhealthy diet, more than 600 million people overweight, including some 42 million children under the age of five,” he said. Almost half of these children lived in Asia and a quarter in Africa.

WHO added that the number of people living with diabetes has also been on the rise, from 108 million in 1980 to 422 million in 2014. Moreover, the disease was directly responsible for 1.5 million deaths in 2012 alone.

“We are recommending that [sugar intake] is reduced to 10 per cent of energy or even five percent,” he said, emphasizing that a key factor in keeping those numbers dangerously high is the ease of availability of sugary drinks in some parts of the world.

While the United States has been the leader in consumption of sugar sweetened drinks, it has been overtaken by Latin
America, where Chile and Mexico are now the top consumers. Unfortunately, he continued, consumption is also rising in China and sub-Saharan Africa, where he said specifically, the rising sugar intake would have a “devastating” effect on obesity and overweight.

“So, we definitely need a strong policy response,” Dr. Branca said, pointing to the report’s call for taxation policies as one of the many important tools that could be used to tackle consumption of sugary drinks.

The report points out that some groups, including people living on low incomes, young people and those who frequently consume unhealthy foods and beverages, are most responsive to changes in prices of drinks and foods and, therefore, gain the highest health benefits.

The report adds that fiscal policies should target foods and beverages for which healthier alternatives are available.

The report presents outcomes of a mid-2015 meeting of global experts convened by WHO and an investigation of 11 recent systematic reviews of the effectiveness of fiscal policy interventions for improving diets and preventing noncommunicable diseases and a technical meeting of global experts.

Other findings include:

- Subsidies for fresh fruits and vegetables that reduce prices by 10 - 30 per cent can increase fruit and vegetable consumption;
- A number of countries have taken fiscal measures to protect people from unhealthy products, including Mexico, which has implemented an excise tax on non-alcoholic beverages with added sugar; and Hungary, which has imposed a tax on packaged products with high sugars, salt or caffeine levels, and;
- Countries, such as the Philippines, South Africa and the United Kingdom have also announced intentions to implement taxes on sugary drinks.

“All girls count,’ says UN, calling for reliable data to uncover and tackle inequalities holding them back

11 October – Girls are the sometimes-hidden change-makers of the present and future, and to make sure their voices are heard, the United Nations is marking the International Day of the Girl Child by calling on governments, civil society groups, and communities to provide more and better gender data to so that in the sustainable development era, no girls are left behind.

“The wellbeing, human rights and empowerment of the world’s 1.1 billion girls are central to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. When we agreed on that agenda, we promised girls quality education and health services,” said Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in his message on the Day, which this year tackle the theme Girls’ Progress = Goals’ Progress: A Global Data Movement.

Noting that the theme is based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Mr. Ban recalled that when adopting those targets last year, the world had committed to ending discrimination and violence against girls, and harmful practices like child marriage. “We pledged to leave no one behind,” he said.

Yet, too often, in villages, shanty towns and refugee camps around the world, girls are the ones left behind: without nutritious food, healthcare or quality education, and at risk of sexual violence. AS such, the UN chief said that investing in girls is both the right thing to do, and the smart thing to do.

“But what cannot be measured cannot be managed. If we do not gather the data we need, we will never know if we are
delivering on our promises, he said, calling for efforts to make sure agreed global initiatives are all girls – from those living in extreme poverty to those living with disabilities or those who are refugees or displaced within their own countries.

“Timely, high-quality data is vital so that we know where we are meeting our promises, and where we are falling behind. Let us all work hard to make sure we count all girls, because all girls count,” said the Secretary-General.

In her statement on the Day, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka stressed that without progress for girls, there can be no real progress on our global commitments to justice and prosperity. “To know what they want and need, we need accurate, reliable, transparent and comparable gender data,” she stressed, noting for example that adolescent girls may share many of the same risks to their health and rights as their younger siblings or older women, but the challenges that they face are sometimes more acute, partly because they are not visible.

With this in mind, she said UN Women is working both on gathering this information, and on building an integrated evidence-base that can help remove the structural barriers to increasing economic empowerment. Last month during the high-level segment of the UN General Assembly, the entity launched the new public-private initiative Making Every Woman and Girl Count.

“Over the next five years, this $65 million initiative will increase the production of gender-sensitive data and ensure the results are used to shape policies and increase accountability. Working with our partners, we are supporting countries to strengthen national capacity and systems to collect, analyze and disseminate gender data to improve statistics on priority issues for girls,” Ms. Mlambo Ngcuka said.

According the UN, only through explicit focus on collecting and analyzing girl-focused, girl-relevant and sex-disaggregated data, and using these data to inform key policy and program decisions, can societies adequately measure and understand the opportunities and challenges girls face, and identify and track progress towards solutions to their most pressing problems.

Yet fewer than 50 countries are able to provide data that is disaggregated by both sex and age, making it difficult to assess poverty, inter-partner violence and adolescent maternal deaths, among other important information. Without this data, girls’ challenges will remain hidden in silence and their potential will not be realized.

It is no wonder, then, that girls like Susmita, a teenager from Odisha, India who has never gone to school wonder: “Is anyone out there even thinking of improving our lives?”

UN Population Fund Executive Director, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin underscored: “Investing in adolescent girls, like Susmita, allows them to stay in school, gain skills, marry later, have fewer and healthier children, and earn a larger income to invest back into their families and communities. These investments must be driven and informed by high-quality data for maximum impact and results, and to track progress. This is particularly important for identifying and tackling the needs of the most marginalized girls – those about whom we often know the least.”

“As we work together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we must acknowledge that our collective success is directly dependent on how we answer Susmita’s question,” he stated, adding that: “Now is the time to fully exploit the power of data as one of the most critical tools for development and for protecting and promoting adolescent girls’ rights.”

The State of World Population report will be launched by UNFPA later this month in order to examine “how the support we provide adolescent girls today will determine our collective well-being tomorrow,” said Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin in his message on the Day.
Ban welcomes start of Guinea-Bissau talks as ‘first step’ in region-led effort to end political crisis

11 October – Welcoming the start of an inclusive dialogue among political leaders, civil society and religious communities of Guinea-Bissau today, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon encouraged all the parties to engage in constructive discussions and “seize this opportunity for a favourable outcome” in the interest of the country’s people.”

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban welcomed the dialogue, under way in neighbouring Guinea, as “the crucial first step” in implementing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) roadmap to end the political crisis, which political leaders agreed to in Bissau on 10 September 2016.

The Secretary-General in the statement thanked the ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea-Bissau, Alpha Condé, President of Guinea, for hosting the parties and leading the regional effort to swiftly implement the roadmap. He further encouraged all parties to engage in constructive discussions and seize this opportunity for a favourable outcome in the interest of the people of Guinea-Bissau.

“He calls on all parties to jointly achieve decisive progress within the coming days, in order to break the political impasse that has prevailed in the country since August 2015,” the statement said.

Mr. Ban has requested his Special Representative and Head of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), Modibo I. Touré, to continue to work closely with all stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau.

This, he will do in close collaboration with ECOWAS, the African Union and other key partners, including the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and the European Union as they work towards political stability in Guinea-Bissau, according to the statement.

Haiti: Seeking to fend off cholera threat, UN agencies deliver aid, call for risk reduction

11 October – One week after Hurricane Matthew slammed into Haiti, United Nations agencies are continuing the massive relief effort under way on the ground, scrambling to fend off the threat of cholera, delivering life-saving supplies and rehabilitating damaged infrastructure, such as schools.

Yesterday, the World Health Organization (WHO) decided to send one million cholera vaccine doses and dispatch Dr. Dominique Legros, WHO’s cholera focal point, to Haiti at the end of the week to discuss with the Ministry of Health how to best use the vaccines.

WHO had already deployed some 80 staff from its regional office, and had also provided materials for cholera care, treatment centres, beds and materials for treatment of patients. The agency has also mobilized partners, such as Médecins Sans Frontières, known as Doctors
Without Borders, which deployed 40 of its own staff.

“The top priority for people affected by the hurricane is to give them access to safe drinking water. It is the only way to control cholera on the long term in Haiti and elsewhere,” Dr. Legros told reporters in Geneva at the regular bi-weekly press briefing, noting that Hurricane Matthew hit at a time when cholera was still putting a heavy burden on the tiny Caribbean island nation.

It is necessary to plan for the worst case scenario and be ready to face the situation with all the usual elements of a response plan such as surveillance, access to safe water, and vaccines.

In the context of flooding and potential contamination of drinking water by faecal sludge, WHO was concerned about the further increase in cholera cases, particularly at this time of the year, as there is usually an increment in cases reported between November and January, he said.

About a quarter of the health care facilities, or 35, including cholera treatment centres and units, have been either destroyed or seriously damaged in the south of the country, which caused problems of access to health care for patients, Dr. Legros said, adding that with partners, WHO staff are actively rebuilding health care facilities.

“IT is necessary to plan for the worst case scenario and be ready to face the situation with all the usual elements of a response plan such as surveillance, access to safe water, and vaccines,” Dr. Legros said.

He said that before the storm, WHO had vaccinated about 400,000 people in Haiti, using 800,000 doses, or two doses per person, essentially in the central part of the country and towards Cap Haitien.

Another one million doses announced yesterday would cover 500,000 people, or one million people if a single-dose approach is used, Dr. Legros explained. Then the protection would be relatively short.

He went on to note that WHO has had one experience of a large-scale single-dose campaign in Bangladesh two years ago. It had proved effective for six months. After six months, there was still a 60 to 70 per cent effectiveness for severe cholera cases. After one year, the effectiveness had disappeared.

“Protection for six months would be enough to cover the period of highest risk in Haiti,” he said.

Dr. Legros said that since the beginning of the cholera outbreak in October 2010 there had been 790,000 cases and more than 9,000 deaths in Haiti. There had since been a sharp drop, but from 2014, cases have increased every year. In 2016, there had been 30,000 cases to date. Not having access to safe water is the main reason for these cases, he added.

**Nearly 100 per cent of crops destroyed in hard-hit southwest**

Meanwhile, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) has reported that in the country’s northwest, 60 to 90 per cent of the harvest has been destroyed, and the fishing industry was paralyzed because boats and fishing materials had been swept away. However in the southwest, where Hurricane Matthew made landfall, almost 100 per cent of the crops are gone.

WFP spokesperson Bettina Luenscher said that food for 300,000 people has been prepositioned in the country, and it has delivered food rations to more than 10,500 people in Jérémie and Les Cayes in the southwest. WFP has been flying aid workers into that part of the country as roads had been damaged.

Once the markets start working again, WFP will move to cash aid, the spokesperson said.

**Education should not be forgotten in emergency situations**

“Education should not be forgotten in emergency situations,” said Christophe Bouluerac, spokesperson for the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Geneva.
In the storm’s wake, more than 100,000 children in Haiti are missing out on learning as their schools were either damaged or converted into shelters.

“At least 100,000 children today will not experience the joy, safety and stimulation that being in a classroom brings,” said UNICEF’s Deputy Representative in Haiti, Jean Metenier, in a news release. “We need to get them back to learning as soon as possible. Hurricane Matthew took away their schools, homes and textbooks. It shouldn’t take away their sense of hope.”

Schools have reopened across the country but, according to initial national estimates, at least 300 public schools have been partially or entirely damaged in the country and many others are being used to shelter displaced families. Schools in Sud and Grande Anse departments will remain closed for at least another week.

UNICEF is working with partners to help set up temporary learning spaces. Priorities include rehabilitating damaged schools, delivering adequate school supplies, furniture and teaching materials, and providing children with psychosocial support.

Together with its partners ACTED and Oxfam, UNICEF has prepositioned emergency supplies for 10,000 people in the departments of Grand Anse and Sud, including water kits, water purification tablets, and mosquito nets. UNICEF has also provided a 10,000 liter water reservoir to the hospital in Les Cayes.

**Investment in disaster risk governance needed**

Meanwhile, Denis McClean, spokesperson for the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) said it is totally unacceptable that hundreds of people could die in a disaster which was as well forecast as Hurricane Matthew.

“There had been plenty of time for warnings to be issued and for evacuations to take place,” he said. “The question now has to be asked: why, six years after the earthquake in Haiti, adequate multi-hazard warning systems were not in place to ensure a minimal loss of life in such events?”

It was totally unacceptable that hundreds of people could die in a disaster which had been so well forecast as Hurricane Matthew

UNISDR is calling for a zero-casualty approach to cyclones and hurricanes preparedness to be supported, in countries like Haiti, he stressed. This requires investment in disaster risk governance to ensure that warnings are disseminated and acted on.

People should know they have a safe place to go to in their neighbourhood, be it a church, a school or another public building, he said, urging greater efforts to ensure that populations in hazard-prone areas are risk-informed, and fully understand the nature of the threat they are facing.

Mr. McClean said that earlier this year, Fiji was hit by a Category 5 cyclone, the strongest storm ever to hit the island nation. The death toll was 44 even though one million people were affected. Similarly, India and Bangladesh had remarkable successes against major cyclone events, which in years past, would have cost thousands of lives. These lessons need to be applied elsewhere, he stressed.
Myanmar: UN adviser expresses deep concern at recent violence in Rakhine, calls for calm

11 October – The United Nations envoy for Myanmar today expressed his deep concern at the violent attacks by unidentified individuals and groups against border guards and security forces on 9 October and the resultant fighting that claimed the lives of security personnel and civilians in the three affected areas of Northern Rakhine.

“At this delicate juncture, the local communities at all levels must refuse to be provoked by these incidents and their leaders must work actively to prevent incitement of animosity or mutual hatred between Buddhist and Muslim communities,” the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Vijay Nambiar, said in a statement.

He said he has been informed by the concerned authorities in the capital, Naypyitaw, that firm instructions have been issued from the highest levels to take action strictly in accordance with the law to maintain peace and avoid escalation.

The Special Adviser called on the civilian population of the area to exercise maximum restraint and not be provoked into any kind of response by targeting other communities or religious groups.

Over the last year, the authorities have shown good organization and discipline in averting any major outbreak of violence between the communities in Rakhine, he noted.

While recognizing the prompt action and sober response of the security forces, Mr. Nambiar urged them to exercise caution in the future to avoid any injuries or loss of innocent civilian lives, collateral damage to properties or any perception of harassment of the local population.

In his Myanmar role which he has held since 2010, the veteran diplomat is tasked with employing the Secretary-General’s ‘good offices’ towards helping the southeast Asian nation on its path of transition towards peace, democratization and development.

In addition to other methods, the Secretary-General uses his ‘good offices’ – diplomatic measures taken publicly and in private, drawing upon his independence, impartiality and integrity – to prevent international disputes from arising, escalating or spreading.
UN rights expert warns about growing restrictions on civil society in Egypt

11 October – The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, warned today about growing restrictions on civil society in Egypt, with human rights defenders and organizations in particular being targeted.

This warning comes two weeks after the Cairo Criminal Court froze the assets of five prominent human rights defenders and three non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as part of a case on foreign funding. The assets will henceforth be under Government custodianship, taking away independent decision-making power from the organizations and human rights defenders.

In a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Mr. Kiai said that such developments represent further Government intervention into a continued crackdown on Egyptian human rights defenders and civil society organizations since the 2011 “173 Foreign Funding Case” was reopened.

As a result, the Egyptian Government has begun what Mr. Kai warns is a systematic attack on civil society “in an effort to silence its voice.” Several organizations and human rights defenders are under investigation.

The crackdown is also finding its way into legislation. On 8 September, the Egyptian Cabinet approved a draft of a new law that would retain the restrictive provisions in the current law governing NGOs (No. 84/2002).

The Special Rapporteur explained that “the draft law also limits NGO work to ‘development and social objectives,’ and imposes a high level of minimum capital required to set up an NGO. Other new elements introduced by the draft law include the establishment of a specific tax for foreign funding, the banning of activists who have received a prison sentence for forming their own NGOs, and requiring the NGOs to conduct work that meets social needs.”

Mr. Kiai is concerned that the new law would exacerbate an already restrictive legislative framework and raise questions about Egypt’s adherence to international human rights obligations. In 2014, under the second UPR cycle, the Government accepted recommendations that would strengthen and encourage the right to freedom of association and put forward new legislation for NGOs that meets international human rights standards.

“I call on the Government of Egypt to halt the ongoing harassment of human rights defenders and organizations and urge the government to ensure the compliance of the NGO draft law with international law standards, following a transparent consultation process with the civil society organizations,” urged the Special Rapporteur today.

Independent Experts and 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.