South Sudan continues to face persistent challenges to peace and stability, Security Council told.

17 November – Briefing the United Nations Security Council for the last time, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan called on the 15-member body to continue to accord priority to the country and to consider the future of its people in taking any decisions.

“The people of South Sudan have suffered far too much and for far too long. The victims of this conflict still carry hope and have high expectations from the international community,” Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj told the Council today.

“I urge all involved and especially the South Sudanese leaders never to lose sight of the ultimate goal – a peaceful and prosperous future for the people of South Sudan,” she added.

Ms. Løj underscored that the difference between the success and failure of the South Sudanese Peace Agreement lied in its comprehensive and inclusive implementation by its parties and
called for sustained regional and international support to the country.

Further in her briefing, she highlighted that the security situation in the country, particularly in the Greater Equatorias, in parts of Unity, and Western Bahr el Ghazal states remained volatile with frequent attacks that resulted in civilian casualties and displacement as well as disrupted supply of essential goods, including food.

The UN envoy also said that the increasingly fragmented conflict – often with ethnic undertones – continued to push the country towards further division and risked a full-scale civil conflict.

“Much more needs to be done by the Transitional Government [of National Unity] to put a stop to these security incidents that contribute to an environment of instability and violence, lead to displacement and exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation,” she said, underscoring the need to take actions that arrest the increasing ethnic tensions.

**UNMISS chief cites ‘dire’ humanitarian situation**

Ms. Løj, also the head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) informed the Council that despite an agreement between the Government and UNMISS on freedom of movement, military commanders on the ground were either not informed of or disregarded the agreement, causing significant challenges to the Mission’s movement and patrols.

Also, she drew attention to the humanitarian situation that continued to remain “dire” with some 4.8 million people estimated to be severely food insecure and farmers in parts of the country likely to miss the upcoming planting season due to lack of availability of seeds, caused by fragile security, noting:

“Our humanitarian colleagues are doing their outmost best to reach people in need but they continue to face obstacles in terms of movement, bureaucratic procedures and criminality.”

This briefing was Ms. Løj’s last briefing to the Security Council as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and the head of UNMISS. She steps down from these positions at the end of November.

**Special Advisor sees ‘all the warning signs’ conflict could spiral into genocide**

Recalling his recent visit to South Sudan, Adama Dieng, the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, painted a grave picture of the situation, saying he had undertaken the trip due to his growing concern about ethnically-fuelled violence, which is taking place against a breakdown in the political process and a stalled peace agreement.

In the course of the week, he had met a variety of stakeholders including religious and community leaders, including in Yei, which been spared the widespread violence of other areas but has now been identified among the country’s conflict hotspots, with escalating violence against multiple tribe and ethnic groups, reportedly carried out by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the SPLA in Opposition, as well as unidentified armed groups and bandits.

“I was dismayed that what I say confirmed my fears that there is strong risk of violence escalating along ethnic lines with a potential to spiral into genocide; I do not say that lightly,” Mr. Dieg told the Council, noting that the ongoing violence is also having an ever-increasing economic cost, both domestically and internationally, causing a drain on funds that could be devoted to much-needed humanitarian assistance.

“South Sudan will see neither growth nor development as long as security accounts for half of Government spending,” he warned.

He went on to say that the early July outbreak of violence was fresh in the minds of people he had met and they noted the potential for more such violence in the coming dry season. Violations of the ceasefire by all sides, widespread impunity and lack of accountability, were clearly evident and the feeling seemed to be that what had once been an undisciplined army formed out of two opposing groups was now an “amorphous and undisciplined force that has splintered into multiple armed groups, criminal gangs and bandits, over which the Government is failing to exercise control.”
What began as a political conflict has transformed into what could become an outright ethnic war. UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Dieng said he had sensed a “tremendous mistrust” between civilians and the military and rather than as a source of protection, many ordinary people saw the armed forces as an entity to be feared or joined as one of the few employers. One elder had given him a chilling assessment of the ethnic polarization: “in the eyes [of some people] he saw fear, while in the eyes of others, he saw enthusiasm.”

The Special Advisor went on to express deep concern about inflammatory rhetoric, stereotyping and name calling have been accompanied by targeted killings and rape of members of particular ethnic groups, and by violent attacks against individuals or communities on the basis of their perceived political affiliation. The media, including social media, are being used to spread hatred and encourage ethnic polarization.

“I am particularly concerned by the involvement of the youth of this country in this dangerous spread of hatred and hostility, as they are particularly susceptible to divisions within society,” continued Mr. Dieng, underscoring: “So, all the warning signs are there, that what began as a political conflict has transformed into what could become an outright ethnic war.”

Indeed, he said the stalled peace agreement, stagnating economy and spread of arms were the “ingredients for a dangerous escalation of violence – because both motivation and a means” are present in South Sudan.

Here, he emphasized that genocide is a process. “It does not happen overnight. And because it is a process and one that takes time to prepare, it can be prevented. Action can and must be taken now to address some of the factors that could provide fertile ground for genocide.”

While the political leadership in South Sudan had and urgent and primary responsibility to this end, the Security Council could also consider, among other options, publicly calling for political leadership to immediately condemn and take steps against any actions that could constitute incitement to violence, he said.

Moreover, African leaders must coalesce around a coherent strategy to prevent an escalation of violence. “I saw all the signs that ethnic hatred and targeting of civilians could evolve into genocide if something is not done now to stop it. I urge the Security Council and Member States of the region to take action,” Mr. Dieng concluded.

**World’s first malaria vaccine set for 2018 rollout in Africa after UN health agency secures funding**

17 November – Having secured the funds for the initial phase of the deployment of the world’s first malaria vaccine, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced today it will be rolled out in sub-Saharan Africa and immunization campaigns will begin in 2018.

“The pilot deployment of this first-generation vaccine marks a milestone in the fight against malaria,” stated Dr. Pedro Alonso, Director of the WHO Global Malaria Programme, adding that these pilot projects will provide valuable evidence from real-life settings to make informed decisions on whether to deploy the vaccine on a wide scale.

The vaccine, known as RTS,S, acts globally against the most deadly malaria parasite *P. falciparum*, very common in Africa. Based on the results from clinical trials, the new vaccine will provide partial protection against malaria in young children.

The vaccine was developed through a partnership between GlaxoSmithKline and the PATH Malaria Vaccine Initiative (MVI), with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and from a network of African research centres.
Full funding – $15 million for the malaria vaccine pilots – for the first phase of the programme, has already been received, and an additional commitment of about $37 million from partners is expected to cover the first four years.

“WHO recognizes and commends the leadership and support of all funding agencies and partners who have made this achievement possible,” said Dr. Jean-Marie Okwo-Bele, Director of the WHO Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals.

According to WHO, the pilot programme will evaluate the feasibility of delivering the required four doses of RTS,S; the impact of RTS,S on lives saved; and the safety of the vaccine in the context of routine use. In addition, it will assess the protective effect of the vaccine on children aged five to 17 months old.

WHO also stressed that because the new vaccine alone is not an absolute malaria prevention tool, it should complement the existing package of the existing malaria prevention measures and tools, including long-lasting insecticidal bed-nets, spraying inside walls of dwellings with insecticides, preventive treatment for infants and during pregnancy, prompt diagnostic testing, and treatment of confirmed cases with effective anti-malarial medicines.

“These pilots are critical to determine whether this vaccine can be rolled out more broadly, adding an important new tool to the proven interventions we already have in the fight against malaria. The Global Fund's commitment marks the beginning of a historic partnership between Gavi, the Global Fund and UNITAID, bringing together three of the world's biggest health financing institutions to tackle one of the leading killers of children,” stated Dr. Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

**UN deputy chief urges donors to support peace consolidation in Central African Republic**

**17 November** – In Brussels, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson today urged an international conference for the Central African Republic (CAR) to show solidarity and pledge the necessary financial support to the Government-identified priorities and reforms needed for the African country’s rehabilitation and stabilization, as well as to bolster humanitarian assistance.

“The Central African Republic is at a crossroads and we need to do all we can to support and unite the forces of good in the country,” Mr. Eliasson said in his remarks to the conference, co-organized in the Belgian capital by the European Union, the Central African Government, the UN and the World Bank. The event aims to secure $1.5 billion in funding to ensure a recovery and peacebuilding in CAR for the next three to five years.

The Conference agreed a Framework of Mutual Accountability for the country.

For his part, Mr. Eliasson stressed that peace and security, recovery, development, stabilization and human rights must go hand in hand, and noted the need for progress on the political front and for dialogue. “But without the rule of law, stabilization efforts will be futile,” he underscored.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country into civil conflict in 2013. Despite significant progress and successful elections, the CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest. More than 13,000 UN staff are currently based there as part of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the country, known as MINUSCA.

**Security situation in CAR ‘still fragile’**
“Less than three years ago, the [country] was on the edge of the abyss. We all remember images of the bloodbath, which flooded the media and caused a shock wave around the world,” Mr. Eliasson recalled, noting that the international community reacted by deploying troops from the subregion, the African Union (AU), France, the EU and the United Nations.

Noting his recent visit to the CAR, he said the security situation remains fragile. “Armed groups continue to pose a threat to civilians and destabilize the authority of the State. The troublemakers resort to violence to disrupt the political process and promote their interests. Human rights violations remain endemic and have multiplied with the recent intensification of violence,” he said.

The UN deputy chief went on to describe a country facing a disastrous humanitarian situation, with some 40 per cent of the population needing some form of humanitarian aid. Moreover, one fifth of the population has been displaced within the country or in neighbouring countries. “Many of these displaced are afraid to return home,” he added.

During his trip to CAR, the Deputy Secretary-General noted that the wounds resulting from the conflict are still clearly visible. "The social fabric is torn. Many Central Africans are deeply traumatized and reconciliation, in some cases, will certainly take time,” he said.

'A country with enormous potential'

The Deputy Secretary-General remains optimistic about the future of the CAR, however, believing that the country can turn the page, consolidate peace, achieve true reconciliation and social cohesion and promote development.

“I found a country with enormous potential, a country with a lot of vitality and dynamism,” he told the conference, saying he had been impressed by the substantial human and material resources available in CAR. “Men and women from all walks of life have told me about their desire for peace and their hope for a different future," he said.

Emphasizing that the country's vast natural resources must be exploited for sustainable development, Mr. Eliasson said: “The investment that promotes regional economic integration will help preserve peace.” It would also be necessary to mobilize the Central African Diaspora for rehabilitation initiatives.

Signature of the Mutual Engagement Framework

Stressing the importance of the Framework for Mutual Commitment between the Central African Government and the international community, which was to be signed by the President of the CAR, Faustin-Archange Touadera, Mr. Eliasson said: “This agreement will support the political advancement at the highest level to promote peace and ensure the implementation of the National Plan for Recovery and Peacebuilding.”

“Coordinated and well-planned initiatives, such as those articulated in the National Plan for Recovery and Peacebuilding will be paramount,” he continued, noting that “while we are committed to all these fronts, the priority of saving lives must remain essential.”

Mr. Eliasson also stressed that progress on the political front is “more essential than ever, especially as a result of recent violence in the capital, Bangui, and elsewhere in the country. He welcomed the recent adoption by the Central African authorities of key reforms and strategies on demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR), the security sector, police reform and reconciliation.

"Dialogue and continued political commitment will be necessary to carry out the implementation of these national plans," he said, adding that the political and financial support of the international community will also be essential for their success.

“At the same time, we must respond to demands and marginalization through continuous and inclusive dialogue and negotiations and the rejection of violence,” said the Deputy Secretary-General. “Armed groups must be disarmed as part of a comprehensive, inclusive and sustained DDR program,” he said, stressing that national defence and security forces must be
transformed to be representative, balanced ethnically, effectively and responsibly. “National reconciliation must be facilitated at all levels,” he underscored.

Stressing that “the United Nations will do its part,” Mr. Eliasson announced the immediate availability of $15 million from the UN Peacebuilding Fund to cover relevant peacebuilding needs.

“Our peacekeeping mission, MINUSCA, will continue to firmly counter the actions of troublemakers to prevent violence, ensure security and protect civilians,” he warned, stating that the UN will also continue political dialogue with the Government on the main priorities of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, security sector reform, reconciliation and social cohesion, restoration of state authority and the fight against Impunity.

**‘Great Green Wall’ initiative offers unique opportunity to combat climate change in Africa – UN agency**

17 November – At the United Nations Climate Conference (COP 22) under way in Marrakech, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) participated in the launch of a ground breaking map of restoration opportunities to combat climate change in Africa, an area being called the ‘Great Green Wall.’

The map is based on a collection and analysis of land-use information in Africa’s drylands in order to improve resilience to climate change.

“The Great Green Wall initiative is Africa’s flagship programme to combat the effects of climate change and desertification,” said Eduardo Mansur, Director of the FAO’s Land and Water Division, as he presented the map yesterday during a high-level event at the 22nd Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

During the event, held at the African Union Pavilion on the theme ‘Resilient Landscapes in Africa’s Drylands: Seizing Opportunities and Deepening Commitments,’ Mr. Mansur explained that so far, the Great Green Wall initiative has shown that degraded lands can be restored, but “these achievements pale in comparison with what is needed.”

According to Mr. Mansur, the tools used to create the map are vital in providing critical information to understand the true nature of restoration needs throughout drylands in North Africa, the Sahel region, and the Horn of Africa.

Through the Global Drylands Assessment, a study conducted by FAO and its partners from 2015-2016, an estimated 166 million hectares of the Great Green Wall area offer opportunities for restoration projects.

The Great Green Wall covers both arid and semi-arid areas in the north and south ends of the Sahara Desert. Its core area consists of 780 million hectares and is home to 232 million people. In order to halt and reverse land degradation, some 10 million hectares must be restored each year. Such an achievement would provide critical support to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In order to obtain the data, experts behind the project analyzed 63,000 half-hectare sample plots spread across drylands in North Africa, Sahel, and the Horn using FAO’s Open Foris Collect Earth tool and extremely high resolution satellite images from Google Earth Engine and Bing Maps.

A variety of restoration approaches are possible and necessary in order to implement the Great Green Wall initiative. These include natural regeneration that allows farmers to protect and manage the natural regeneration of forests, croplands and grasslands; large-scale land preparation and enrichment planning, especially in areas where degradation is severe; mobilization of high-quality seeds and planting materials; and involving communities in the selection of native species to be
used.

In areas closer to the desert, sustainable management of oases systems and use of native woody and grassy vegetation can help fight sand encroachment.

The data collection is a collaborative effort on behalf of FAO, the African Union, the CILSS/AGRHYMET Regional Centre, the Directorate General of Forests in Tunisia, Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, Google, and the World Resources Institute.

The map itself was made possible due to support from Action Against Desertification, an African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States initiative to support the Great Green Wall programme, as well as national UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) action plans and south-south cooperation, FAO, and funding from the European Union.

**MARRAKECH: ‘We need everyone,’ Ban says, urging society-wide engagement in implementation of Paris climate accord**

17 November – Rallying stakeholders gathered in Marrakech, Morocco, for the United Nations Climate Conference, known as ‘COP 22,’ Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged everyone – “from the local to the global” – including the private sector, cities and civil society, to get involved in the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

“We need everyone. And we need action from the local to the global. Partnerships should focus on results today – and make progress for the long-term. We have no time to waste, and much to gain, by acting now,” Mr. Ban told a High-Level event on Accelerating Climate Action.

The President of COP 22, Salaheddine Mezouar, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco, noted that “without minimizing the eminent responsibility of States,” the contribution of non-State actors serves as a “structuring supplement” to multilateral action against the impacts of change.

Last December at the previous Conference, known as COP 21, 196 Parties to the UNFCCC adopted the Paris Agreement, so-named after the French capital where it was approved. It aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping the global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The Agreement entered into force on 4 November 2016, in time for COP 22, which has been under way since 7 November.

The Global Climate Action Agenda, launched formally in 2014 at COP 20, in Lima, Peru, aims to mobilize non-State actors in addressing climate change.

In Paris the next year, two Climate Champions, Laurence Tubiana, French Ambassador for climate change negotiations, and Hakima El Haité, Moroccan Minister for the Environment, were appointed to accelerate joint action on the Agenda.

“We have found committed partners, partners on the move, cooperative partners,” said Ms. El Haité at the high-level meeting. “The business community understands that this is where future growth lies. Investors have realized that this is where sustainable returns can be found.”

Ms. Tubiana announced today the launch of the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action, with the aim of ensuring that efforts are “more coherent, more continuous, and stronger.” The Partnership “belongs to everyone, all those who seek to
extend climate action. It will seek to create space for everyone to work together, remove barriers, understand solutions and see the future in a much more active and optimistic way,” she added.

For his part, Mr. Ban said the Action Agenda is “central to this effort” to implement the Paris Agreement on the ground. “We need to immediately drive a radical transformation of the global economy”, he said, adding that the private sector has a key role to play.

The Secretary-General went on to stress the importance of adaptation. Climate resilient innovations are needed to help billions of people adapt to increasing droughts, floods, temperatures and other impacts. “Adaptation is not a luxury. It is a prudent investment in our future”, he said.

The UN chief said he was pleased to see so many African countries mobilizing climate action, taking as an example the Adaptation of African Agriculture initiative. “This partnership will help create more resilient food systems on the continent and advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),” he stated.

Tuesday, at the opening of the high-level segment of COP 22, dozens of Heads of State and Government showed a strong support for the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Before the Conference wraps up on 18 November, parties hope to define the rules for the accord and to lay out a viable plan for providing at least $100 billion a year to developing countries to support climate action.

**One month into Mosul battle, UN and partners ‘profoundly concerned’ for civilian safety**

*17 November* – At the one-month mark of Iraqi military operations to oust terrorists from Mosul, the United Nations and its partners today said tens of thousands of families in newly retaken areas urgently requiring life-saving assistance and warned that the humanitarian community in Iraq faces a “massive scope” of need.

Expressing their “profound concern” in a joint statement, UN relief agencies and their partners underscored that these latest developments further exacerbate a humanitarian crisis in a country where 10 million people already were in need of aid. In newly retaken areas, schools, hospitals, and infrastructure – such as water and power plants – are damaged and medical services are often unavailable.

Families are going hungry as a result of loss of livelihoods, disruptions in food production and supply, and higher market prices. Water supplies and agricultural equipment have also been damaged, leading people to drink untreated well water. Children are not vaccinated, nor do they have access to formal education. Many require psychosocial support.

Furthermore, the agencies emphasized that the armed groups controlling Mosul have created both immediate and long term risks for people and the environment thanks to scorched earth tactics and improvised mines.

“Wherever we can, humanitarian partners are helping displaced people and vulnerable families in newly retaken communities,” announced Lise Grande, Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, who spoke on behalf of the humanitarian community.

“We are working as quickly as we can and in close coordination with Iraqi authorities to help some of the most at-risk people in the world,” she added.
At the onset of the offensive by Iraqi government forces against ISIL in the city of Mosul, on 17 October 2016, United Nations agencies stepped up their response, marshalling efforts to provide assistance to displaced civilians caught up in the fighting that ensued. One month on, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) has provided food assistance to more than 100,000 people affected by the conflict, with ready-to-eat food and monthly food rations.

Almost 59,000 people have been displaced over the past month, 26,000 of which are children. More than 40,000 are living in formal camps throughout three governorates prepared and managed by the UN, Iraqi Government, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). More than half of those who have been displaced are women and girls who are survivors of sexual assault and other human rights abuses. Many households are female-headed.

More than 100 humanitarian partners, as well as the United Nations and the Government of Iraq, are assisting those affected by the military operations. Experts are worried, however, that given the imminent operations to reach more densely-populated portions of the city, many families will be unable to reach safety and assistance.

According to the joint statement, a worst case scenario would leave one million people at extreme risk for cross-fire, snipers, and contamination from improvised explosive devices. There is also a risk that civilians will continue to be used as human shields.

The agencies said that 13,000 displaced people are living with host communities or in public facilities. In addition, 69,000 have been given assistance within 48 hours of their displacement, including more than 114,000 who have received food rations, more than 14,300 recipients of emergency health services, more than 66,000 who were provided with emergency household items, and some 124,000 now have access to water, hygiene, and sanitation services.

More than 6,700 women and girls have received reproductive consultations, including life-saving assisted deliveries. 1,400 sessions have been held to support survivors of gender-based violence. Meanwhile, stakeholders are expanding shelter capacities and building new sites.

Donor support to the UN and NGOs has been critical, but more is urgently needed. Winter is approaching and families who fled their homes have virtually nothing to guard against the cold.

“The humanitarian community calls upon all parties in the conflict to take every possible measure to protect the rights and lives of civilians as part of their obligations under international humanitarian law,” the statement concluded.

UN health agency denounces attacks on health facilities in Syria

17 November – The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) today condemned attacks on five Syrian hospitals – including two trauma centres and an emergency obstetric centre – as well as a mobile medical clinic, and demanded that all parties to the five-year conflict respect the neutrality of health workers, health facilities and medical supplies.

“The pattern of attacks indicates that health care is being deliberately targeted in the Syrian conflict – this is a major violation of international law and a tragic disregard of our common humanity,” WHO said in a statement today.

“These attacks have seriously reduced the availability of health services in northern Syria and resulted in a major disruption of referrals of critically injured and ill patients,” the agency added.

The attacks took place between 13-15 November and, according to reports, killed at least two people and injured 19 others, including six medical staff.
Of the facilities attacked, three hospitals – including a frontline trauma centre and a second-line trauma centre – were located in western rural Aleppo and two were located in Idleb – one of which was a key referral hospital for comprehensive emergency obstetric care.

On a monthly basis, these hospitals were providing more than 20,000 consultations, and performing more than 600 deliveries and 1,700 major surgeries.

In addition, a mobile clinic in Idleb’s Jishr-Ash-Shugur area, providing essential basic healthcare to more than 3,500 patients was also attacked.

According to WHO, such attacks in the war-ravaged country have increased in both frequency and scale.

Thus far in 2016, the agency and its partners have documented 126 such attacks across Syria.

“The attack of five hospitals and a mobile clinic in less than 48 hours is an outrage that puts many more lives in danger in Syria and deprives the most vulnerable – including children and pregnant women – of their right to health services, just at the time when they need them most,” it noted.

'Philosophy is an art of living together,' says UNESCO on World Philosophy Day

17 November – Marking World Philosophy Day, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is encouraging people of the world to share their philosophical heritages and “dare to open spaces for free, open and tolerant thinking.”

The Day falls every third Thursday in November, and this year, it follows the International Day of Tolerance.

“This coincidence is deeply significant, given the link between tolerance and philosophy. Philosophy thrives on the understanding of, respect and consideration for the diversity of opinions, thoughts, and cultures that enrich the way we live in the world,” said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova.

“As with tolerance, philosophy is an art of living together, with due regard to rights and common values. It is the ability to see the world with a critical eye, aware of the viewpoints of others, strengthened by the freedom of thought, conscience, and belief,” she added.

To celebrate the day, UNESCO has organized a number of events that will take place between 16 and 18 November at its headquarters in Paris. They include international encounters on new philosophical practices, a roundtable on tolerance, the launching of the UNESCO Chair on the Practice of Philosophy with Children, a roundtable for teaching Aristotle, and a night of philosophy to wrap up the three days.

Traditionally, philosophical thinkers hold that astonishment is at the root of philosophy – the discipline stems from our natural tendency to be astonished by ourselves and the world in which we live.

Philosophy teaches us to reflect on reflection itself, to question well-established truths, and to verify hypotheses in order to find conclusions. This kind of inquiry has been practiced for centuries in cultures around the world and has generated the basis for critical, independent, and creative thought.

“Philosophy does not offer any ready-to-use solutions, but a perpetual quest to question the world and try to find a place in it,” explained Ms. Bokova. “Along this road, tolerance is both a moral virtue and a practical tool for dialogue.”
World Philosophy Day is of particular importance to the United Nations as it provides conceptual bases of principles and values on which world peace depends: democracy, human rights, justice, and equality.

This year, UNESCO celebrates the birthdays of Aristotle and Leibniz, two eminent philosophers who contributed to the development of metaphysics and science, logic, and ethics. They placed philosophy at the core of public life.

“Let us, in turn, celebrate this spirit,” said Ms. Bokova. “Let us dare to open spaces for free, open and tolerant thinking.”

**New UN initiative aims to save lives and cut climate change by protecting peatlands**

17 November – A new global initiative was launched today at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 22) under way in Marrakech, aims to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions and save thousands of live by protecting peatlands – the largest terrestrial organic soil carbon stock.

According to the UN environment Programme (UNEP), the Global Peatlands Initiative seeks mobilize governments, international organizations and academia in an effort to protect peatlands, which contain almost 100 times more carbon than tropical forests.

If global temperatures continue to rise, this could lead to thawing permafrost, switching boreal and Arctic peatlands from carbon sinks to sources, resulting in huge amounts of greenhouse gas emissions and potentially causing climate change to spiral out of control.

Erik Solheim, head of UN Environment stressed that despite the Paris Agreement, global temperatures will rise over 3 degrees Celsius this century. “This will cause misery and chaos for millions of vulnerable people, so we cannot afford to let any opportunity to reduce emissions slip by,” he added.

Mr. Solheim also urged taking action through the Global Peatlands Initiative, as it is “critical we do not reach the tipping point that will see peatlands stop sinking carbon and start spewing it into the atmosphere, destroying any hope we have of controlling climate change.”

UNEP said that peatlands are coming under increased threat from conversion for palm oil and pulp wood production, which may result in environmental problems such as enormous fires in Indonesia and Russia in recent years. In recent years, Indonesia has suffered from peat forest fires, resulting in greater emissions than the daily ones from the entire United States economy.

However, emission is not the only negative impact of peatland degradation. The 2015 peat fires in Indonesia may have indirectly killed up to 100,000 people through the toxic haze, in addition to causing $16.1 billion in economic damage, according to recent studies.

Therefore, with support from over a dozen partners, a UN Environment team launched the largest effort on peat so far, called the Global Peatlands Initiative, which aims to increase the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of peatlands in countries with significant peat deposits.

The initiative was launched at the Global Landscapes Forum, the leading side event of the UN’s COP22 climate change talks in Marrakech, Morocco. The Global Peatlands Initiative was founded by the governments of Indonesia, Peru, the Republic of Congo, UNEP, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, CIFOR, Wetlands International, UNEP-WCMC, GRID-Arendal, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, European Space Agency, WRI, Greifswald Mire Centre and StarVision/Satelligence.
Colombia: UN-led mechanism investigating alleged ceasefire violation

17 November – The tripartite Mechanism coordinated by the United Nations and comprising the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP) has started investigations into a 15 November incident in the country’s Santa Rosa municipality that resulted in the deaths of two FARC-EP members.

“The tripartite Mechanism deeply regrets and expresses concern about the first deaths since the beginning of the Bilateral Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities, on 29 August,” read a news release issued by the Mechanism, which is coordinated by the UN Mission in Colombia.

“AUpon completing the investigation, the Mechanism will issue the necessary recommendations to avoid recurrence of such incidents,” it added.

A third FARC-EP member – who was unharmed in the incident – is also being investigated, noted the release.

The tripartite Mechanism is monitoring and verifying the ceasefire under a protocol, agreed by the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP, according to which they agreed “not to enter armed contact” and “to maintain the discipline and control of the units so as not to generate acts or incidents that endanger the ceasefire.”

As part of its mandate, the Mechanism is also investigating another alleged incident in the municipality of Tumaco, department of Nariño (located in southwest Colombia).

Also in the news release, the Mechanism called upon the two parties to facilitate the flow of information and to maintain communications that will strengthen its coordination. It also said that it is open to receiving information from civilians and social organizations.

The release also highlighted that the Mechanism underlined the importance of maintaining the parties’ commitment to respect the Bilateral Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities.
At governing body, UN atomic agency chief highlights agency’s priorities for 2017

17 November – Nuclear safety and security, health and nutrition, and food and agriculture will be the main technical programmes for the United Nations atomic agency next year, its head told the agency’s governing body.

Yukiya Amano, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) also briefed the Board on the agency’s verification and monitoring activities in Iran as well as on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and Syria.

“Together, these [three areas] account for 71 per cent of the core programme budget for 2017,” Mr. Amano said at the agency’s Board of Governors Meeting being held in Austria’s capital, Vienna.

He further reported on the agency’s assistance to countries in responding to the Zika virus, its broader activities as well as on management issues.

“Our research into ways of further developing the sterile insect technique against the Aedes mosquitoes, which transmit Zika, has been intensified,” he said, noting IAEA’s work with countries in the Western Hemisphere.

IAEA had successfully used the sterile insect technique to help the Dominican Republic respond to the Mediterranean fruit fly infestation in 2015.

Mr. Amano also updated the Board on the modernisation of IAEA nuclear applications laboratories, near Vienna and on the construction of a new insect pest control laboratory and a flexible modular laboratory.

He also briefed them on the agency’s participation at the 22nd Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (popularly known as COP 22,) in Marrakech and explained that nuclear power produces a steady baseload of electricity while emitting very low levels of greenhouse gases.

Nuclear power has already made a significant contribution to avoiding carbon dioxide emissions, he noted.

“Nuclear power and renewable energy sources complement each other,” he added, noting that there are some 450 nuclear power reactors in operation in 30 countries today and 60 reactors are under construction.

He next informed the Board of IAEA programmes on nuclear security as well as in the health and medical sector, including assisting Peru in using nuclear technology to improve the quality of life of patients with severe burns or lesions.

Verification and Monitoring in Iran

Mr. Amano said the IAEA continued to verify and monitor Iran’s implementation of its nuclear-related commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

“For the second time since implementation of the JCPOA began, Iran’s inventory of heavy water exceeded 130 metric tonnes,” he said, adding:

“Iran has since made preparations to transfer a quantity of heavy water out of the country, under the verification and
monitoring of the Agency. Once it has been transferred, Iran’s stock of heavy water will be below 130 metric tonnes. It is important that such situations should be avoided in future in order to maintain international confidence in the implementation of the JCPOA, which represents a clear gain for nuclear verification in Iran.”

**Concern on the nuclear programme of DPR Korea**

Reiterating serious concern about the nuclear programme of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), which has conducted two more nuclear tests this year, the head of IAEA called upon the country to fully comply with its obligations under relevant UN Security Council resolutions and to resolve all outstanding issues, including those that have arisen during the absence of agency inspectors from the country since 2009.

“The Agency maintains its readiness to play an essential role in verifying the DPRK’s nuclear programme,” he noted.

**Safeguards implementation in Syria**

Speaking on the implementation of the Safeguards Agreement in Syria, Mr. Amano said that according to IAEA’s assessment, “it was very likely” that the building destroyed at the Dair Alzour site in 2007 was a nuclear reactor that should have been declared to the agency by Syria under the Agreement.

“The Agency is still unable to provide any assessment concerning the nature or operational status of three other locations,” he said, urging the country “to cooperate fully with IAEA in connection with all unresolved issues.”

**Nigeria: UN expert seeks urgent answers on ‘brutal’ eviction of 30,000 people in Lagos**

17 November – A United Nations human rights expert has appealed to the Government of Nigeria for an urgent explanation of the forced eviction of 30,000 people in Lagos state in the last week.

“It has been brought to my attention that the evictions may have involved the extreme use of force and fire by the Nigerian police force and Lagos state government, leaving individuals and families scrambling in the middle of the night to find safety and shelter,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, Leilani Farha, in a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Four people are reported to have died in the latest operation to clear irregular developments along the state’s waterfronts. Residents in the Otudo Gbame community say they suffered brutal treatment and are now homeless. Most of the people affected lived in poor fishing communities and say they have lost their livelihoods and food sources as well as their homes and possessions.

“The mass displacement and reports of four deaths are deeply disturbing,” she stressed.

In an urgent communication, Ms. Farha has asked the Nigerian Government for information on the evictions, the methods used and their compliance with international human rights law.

She is also questioning whether the community was given adequate notice or alternative accommodation, as required by international law. The operation took place only days after the Lagos state High Court had issued an injunction restraining demolitions in the waterfront communities.

It takes many years to build a home, a community, and a sense of trust with government, but only days to destroy it.

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With nowhere to go, many people still remain in Lagos’ Badia East, Nigeria, amidst the ruins of their demolished houses. (October 2015) Photo: Sam Olukoya/IRIN
“What makes these evictions particularly concerning is that they were carried out in blatant disregard of a court order and have completely ignored international human rights guidelines on forced evictions,” the UN Special Rapporteur said.

“International law is clear: there must be consultation with the affected community, all alternative options to eviction must be explored, and a resettlement plan must be in place should the evictions be carried out,” she noted and urged: “Under no circumstances should force or fire be used.”

The people affected, from the Egun and other ethnic minority populations, with no other options, lived in poor-quality homes along creeks and other waterfronts.

“It takes many years to build a home, a community, and a sense of trust with government, but only days to destroy it. It is truly unfortunate that so many people are left with literally nothing but memories of their former lives and questions about their human rights,” the independent expert said.

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 must ally with Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in resolving and preventing conflicts, Security Council told**

17 November – Citing more than 20 years of collaboration between the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), a senior UN political official today urged greater efforts by the two entities to draw on each other’s strengths and devise joint strategies to prevent and resolve conflicts.

“The magnitude and complexity of [global and regional] challenges are simply too big for any country or organization to tackle alone,” Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Miroslav Jenca told the UN Security Council during an open debate, which explored best ways for the two organizations to enhance their strategic partnership in preventing and countering extremist ideology.

“To be successful in preventing and resolving conflicts, we need to join forces with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, to devise joint strategies and draw on our comparative advantages,” he added.

The UN has been working closely with the OIC for more than 20 years in promoting a culture of peace, tolerance and understanding, he said, noting that in the last years, the UN, in particular through the Department of Political Affairs, has stepped up its cooperation with the regional organization and has engaged with it to promote a deeper political dialogue.

“There is no doubt that our cooperation has not been without challenges,” he said. “Resources, capabilities and mandates vary, and our memberships, although overlapping, are different. The strategies of the United Nations and the OIC, at times, may also be different.”

The best approach to these challenges is to deepen strategic dialogue to forge common approaches to emerging crises, he said, explaining that their cooperation is reinforced through direct contacts between the secretariats of the two organizations and between the specialized agencies and bodies of the UN system and the OIC.

He also said that the UN supports the OIC call for “strengthening its role in conflict prevention, confidence building, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitations in Member States as well as in conflict situations
involving Muslim communities.”

The UN has taken a number of steps to institutionalize its relationship with the OIC by helping strengthen its capacity through mediation and electoral assistance, and by holding desk-to-desk talks with the OIC on areas of mutual concern, such as peace and security, he added.

Mr. Jenca went on to highlight how the two entities worked together closely in addressing challenges in several countries and regions.

The UN and the OIC share common objectives in promoting and facilitating the Middle East peace process and the question of Palestine. On Yemen, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UK Department for International Development and the OIC co-chaired a high-level event on the humanitarian situation in the country.

The UN appreciates the OIC’s support for a peace process in Afghanistan, whose realization is crucial for long-term growth and stability of the country. In Sudan, the partnership between the UN and the OIC remains an indispensable part of the collective effort of the international community to bring peace, security and development to that country. In Darfur, the core of that partnership has been the support of the OIC for the signing and the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur.

In Somalia, the UN and the OIC maintain a critical partnership in state-building, as well as in promoting comprehensive peace and security. In Mali, the OIC was a member of the international mediation team during the 2014-15 inter-Malian dialogue and remains a committed member of the Agreement Monitoring Committee to this day.

During the electoral process in the Central African Republic (CAR) at the end of 2015, the OIC played an instrumental role in defusing tensions between rival political parties in the country. In agreement with Chad, the OIC successfully called on the Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) to cease hostilities in the CAR and allow for the elections to take place in areas that were under its influence.

The UN appreciates the OIC’s support to the political dialogue process in Libya, and the OIC has played a key role in Sierra Leone’s recovery efforts since the civil war there and, more recently, in the aftermath of the Ebola outbreak.

“Let us use this valuable Security Council meeting to reaffirm and deepen our common commitment to promoting peace, respect for human rights and offer of better opportunity for all the peoples of these regions and the world,” he concluded.