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Attacks on health care and medical personnel in crises occur with ‘alarming frequency’ – UN

26 May – The World Health Organization (WHO) said in a new report today that attacks on health care in emergency situations disrupt the delivery of essential health services, endanger care providers, deprive people of urgently needed medical attention, and undermine long-term health development goals.

According to the report, Attacks on Health Care: Prevent, Protect, Provide, over the two-year period from January 2014 to December 2015, there were 594 reported attacks on health care that resulted in 959 deaths and 1,561 injuries in 19 countries with emergencies.

The most disturbing challenge for health care providers during emergencies is when they themselves are the victims of attacks – real or threatened, targeted or indiscriminate, the report emphasized.

“Yet, we witness with alarming frequency a lack of respect for the sanctity of health care, for the right to health care, and for

For information media - not an official record
international humanitarian law: patients are shot in their hospital beds, medical personnel are threatened, intimidated or attacked, hospitals are bombed,’ WHO said.

Such attacks not only endanger health care providers; they also deprive people of urgently needed care when they need it most. And while the consequences of such attacks are as yet largely undocumented, they are presumed to be significant – negatively affecting short-term health care delivery as well as the longer-term health and well-being of affected populations, health systems, the health workforce, and ultimately our global public health goals.

More than half of the attacks were against health-care facilities and another quarter of the attacks were against health-care workers. Sixty-two per cent of the attacks were reported to have intentionally targeted health care, the report found.

In a press release, WHO highlighted that it collaborates closely with others to better understand the problem, bring attention to the issue, and find solutions that can prevent attacks; protect health facilities, workers, transport and supplies; and ensure the continued provision of health care despite such attacks.

Noting that currently there is no publicly available source of consolidated information on attacks on health care in emergencies, the agency said the report is a first attempt to consolidate and analyze the data available from open sources. While the data are not comprehensive, the findings shed light on the severity and frequency of the problem, WHO said.

Even one attack on health care is one too many. Therefore, the number of reported attacks reflected in this report is tragic, said WHO, underscoring that the high tolls of death and injury to our health colleagues and the inevitable impact on health service delivery call for greater action.

The main conclusions to be drawn from the analysis of the available data are the following:

- standardize information;
- document health impact;
- establish global repository;
- advocate at all levels; and
- document and apply good practice to reduce risk.

**At Security Council, UN officials cite climate change among factors impacting Sahel region’s stability**

26 May – At a meeting today in the United Nations Security Council on the situation in the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa, senior UN officials stressed that climate change plays a direct role in the region’s security, development and stability by increasing drought and fuelling conflict.

Speaking via videoconference from Niger, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and Head of the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA), Mohamed Ibn Chambas, said that he had just met President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger as part of a tour of Sahelian countries on the frontline of humanity’s struggle against climate change.

The envoy also noted that Boko Haram had galvanized attention to the effects of climate change. Another regional example of the effects of climate change included the situation of the Niger River, some sections of which had already begun to dry up, he said.

In addition to climate change, the special representative cited the renewed insurgency in the Niger delta, terrorist activities in northern Mali, deadly conflicts over resources, as well as organized crime, trafficking and violent extremism as threats affecting the region.
Mr. Chambas emphasized that while the fight against terrorism in the region was beginning to yield tangible results, more efforts were needed to support the military campaign against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin area.

Noting that the Lake Chad Basin region was home to up to 50 million people – a population expected to double by 2030 – Mr. Chambas also said the region directly provided livelihoods to about 2 million people and supplied nearly 13 million with food.

For its part, the UN was committed, within the parameters of its mandate, to help the region address its challenges, the special representative stressed, highlighting that cooperation was needed in that regard. Although tackling climate change and insecurity was the primary responsibility of the region’s Governments, their budgets were already stretched, he said.

In addition, he noted that humanitarian needs continued to grow in the Sahel, with some 9.2 million people needing assistance. Only a small percentage of the $535 million requested for humanitarian assistance had been met, the special representative said.

Also speaking at today’s meeting was Jean-Paul Laborde, Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), who emphasized that climate change was an “aggravator” of conflict and violent extremism in the region, in addition to poor governance, economic instability and unemployment.

Mr. Laborde also noted that few organized crime cases had been prosecuted in the region, stressing that although criminal groups and terrorists might have different objectives, they shared common ground in their recruitment techniques and other activities. In addition, he noted that porous borders and corruption also worked alongside climate change to exacerbate the region’s challenges.

He also said that while concerted action by the region’s countries had weakened Boko Haram, it continued to affect the civilian population. Terrorism was also a complex and constantly evolving threat in the region, he stressed, noting that the UN must ensure that perpetrators of terrorism were punished.

For her part, Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) said the opportunity for coherent action in the Sahel “appears to be closing quickly,” as immense challenges press in and the population grows at annual rates of up to four per cent. For the bulk of the population there, “life is already tough and will get tougher,” creating a breeding ground for disillusionment, crime, radicalization and conflict.

With up to 80 per cent of the region’s people eking out a living from the land, climate change and the accompanying land degradation would further destabilize the situation, she said, warning that tensions over land and water shortages could spiral out of control, as they had done in Darfur.

She recalled her visits last April, with Thomas Friedman of the New York Times, to two towns in northern Niger that used to be tourist hubs and trading centres but which are now major transit points for migrants and where people smuggling has become the only viable economic activity. With desperation increasing, it was estimated that close to 60 million people could migrate to North Africa and Europe by 2035, due to the desertification of sub-Saharan Africa, she said.

She went on to say that interventions to improve the situation in rural areas of the Sahel should prioritize employment and income-generating opportunities, adding that they and should also include clearly-defined land- and water-use and access rules as well as equitable land tenure systems. Calling for rapidly accelerated investment in land rehabilitation and sustainable land management, she said that a land-based approach would build resilience of rural communities to climate change, enhance food and water security and help stabilize much of the region.

“We are not claiming it is a silver bullet, but it would definitely be cheaper and more effective than investing in walls, wars and relief,” said Ms. Barbut.

The day’s final briefer, Hindou Omuarou Ibrahim, Coordinator of the Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad, said climate change and desertification have become part of the daily lives of the Sahel’s peoples and are a major cause of instability and insecurity. She said many species of animals and plants have disappeared since she her childhood. Competition over resources was leading to “the survival of the fittest,” she stressed.
Yemen: ‘hope’ emanating from UN-sponsored talks, as details of peace agreement discussed

26 May – The United Nations envoy for Yemen said today that hope is emanating from the ongoing peace talks for the country as the warring parties started discussing details of elements that would be included in a comprehensive agreement.

Speaking to reporters in Kuwait, where the UN-mediated Yemeni talks are taking place, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, stressed that Yemen is at a critical stage, with the economy in tatters, its infrastructure ruined, and the country’s social fabric disintegrating.

“The situation on the ground is dire but there is hope emanating from Kuwait,” he said, adding that only the participants in the talks can change the situation.

In brief, he said that the talks are ongoing, the international support is stronger than ever and the UN is determined to achieve a lasting peace and to solidify any agreement reached.

On Monday, a joint plenary session was held in which the leaders of both delegations renewed their commitment to dialogue to reach a political agreement, that is acceptable by all.

The Special Envoy convened a number of bilateral meetings with the delegations over the past few days, and discussed specifically the details and mechanisms of withdrawal, handover of weapons, resumption of political dialogue, restoration of state institutions and other matters that will be included in a comprehensive agreement.

The discussions also covered the importance of guarantees and reassurances to ensure the implementation of an agreement, he said. The parties have started to address specific and sensitive matters in detail based on the agreed reference points.

On the issue of prisoners, it was agreed that the relevant Committee will continue to work separately. Yesterday, representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) came to Kuwait to brief the delegations on the roles and guidelines for prisoners release and exchange processes in war zones as well as the mechanisms of ICRC’s work in this area.

Also yesterday, the Special Envoy briefed the Security Council in a closed-session through video conference, giving an overview of the talks, the preliminary understandings reached and explained the compromises and solutions that are currently being considered. He also gave a summary of the support needed by his Office in order to facilitate the implementation of a peace agreement, including support for interim security arrangements.

The ongoing conflict has destroyed the country’s economic infrastructure and severely disrupted the functioning of state institutions. Last week saw a sharp devaluation of the Yemeni Riyal and an alarming decline of the resources and liquidity held by the country’s treasury.

In this regard, the Special Envoy proposed to the parties the creation of an “Economic Task Force” in the near future. This body would enlist the support of economic experts in order to manage the situation and take the necessary measures to save the economy.

The cessation of hostilities has led to a direct reduction in violence and allowed humanitarian agencies to deliver aid to most areas in Yemen. The delivery of aid, basic medical services, pharmaceutical supplies and drinking water has increased over the last few weeks. UN agencies, in coordination with their partners, are working on providing literacy and math classes for children.
“I am increasingly asked how long the talks will last. There is no time limit and we will stay as long as it takes,” he said, adding that a sustainable and inclusive agreement cannot be rushed.

**Justice and accountability ‘critical components’ for lasting peace in Libya – ICC Prosecutor**

26 May – Justice, accountability and the deterrent effects of the law remain “critical components” for achieving lasting peace in Libya, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) told the United Nations Security Council today, encouraging the country’s Government to give priority to devising effective plans and strategies to address atrocity crimes, and to invest in the relevant national institutions responsible for such work.

“This will demonstrate, in concrete terms, that justice and accountability constitute key Government priorities underpinning efforts to ensure peace and stability in Libya, and that the victims will have the opportunity to seek redress through the Libyan courts,” said ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, as she presented her latest report on the situation in the country to the Council.

Ms. Bensouda said that the past six months had witnessed significant developments in Libya’s “slow and difficult” process towards the establishment of a unity Government, and that her office hoped that the signing in December 2015 of the UN-brokered agreement “marks the beginning of the end of the long period of turmoil and conflict in Libya.”

For its part, her office stood ready to work collaboratively with the Government of National Accord in its efforts to build a secure, peaceful and prosperous Libya for all Libyan people, she said.

Over the same period, her office’s investigation into the Libya situation had progressed, albeit at a slower pace than it would have liked due to lack of sufficient resources and the prevailing precarious security situation in the country, the prosecutor said.

Despite such challenges, her office’s investigations were continuing to yield positive results, in large part due to the cooperation of the Libyan Prosecutor-General’s office.

Her office was continuing to carefully analyse and assess the evidence in its possession to determine whether the requisite legal standards were met to request additional arrest warrants, the prosecutor said.

Turning to the situation in Libya, Ms. Bensouda said it requires collaboration and coordination between all relevant actors at the national, regional and international levels, as well as the support of the Council.

“Success in Libya therefore depends on the collective determination and will of all relevant actors to meaningfully contribute to the course of bringing perpetrators to justice and by so doing, help deter the commission of future crimes,” she said.

The threat of Da’esh or other groups proclaiming allegiance to Al-Qaida remained real and the consequences were too costly to be ignored, the prosecutor said. Such consequences included instability and the dire humanitarian situation in Libya, which in turn result in mass migration and the spread of terrorism in the country and the region.

In that vein, the prosecutor reiterated calls to all national and international law enforcement agencies working on Libya to contact her office and join in its efforts to strengthen the network of law enforcement agencies that “aim to contribute to bringing an end to civilian suffering and destruction in Libya.”
“I remain convinced that increased cooperation between and amongst relevant actors as well as coordinated investigative activities are key for tackling national, transnational and international crimes that continue to plague Libya and for ensuring that those responsible for committing these crimes have no safe haven anywhere,” she said.

In that regard, Ms. Bensouda said she was particularly pleased with the interest and efforts thus far by national law enforcement agencies to coordinate with my office, with each other and with Libyan authorities.

The prosecutor also urged the Government of National Accord to prioritize the transfer of Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi to its own custody and facilitate his surrender to the ICC. It was also important for the Government of National Accord to consult with the Pre-Trial Chamber on issues relating to the surrender of Mr. Gaddafi, and to seek assistance from the international community on how best to facilitate his surrender to the Court without further delay, she said.

Emphasizing that Libya had submitted to the ICC that Mr. Gaddafi continues to be in custody in Zintan and is presently “unavailable” to the Libyan State, the prosecutor noted that her office had recently filed a request with the Pre-Trial Chamber for an order directing the Registry to transmit the request for arrest and surrender Mr. Gaddafi directly to Mr. al-‘Ajami al-‘Atiri, the commander of the battalion that is detaining Mr. Gaddafi in Zintan.

Regarding Abdullah Al-Senussi, Ms. Bensouda said her office had received a copy of the written judgment of the Libyan court in relation to his case, and had conducted a preliminary review of the judgment.

“At this time, the office is not in possession of facts which would satisfy it that new facts have arisen which negate the basis on which Pre-Trial Chamber I found Mr. Al-Senussi’s case inadmissible,” she said, adding that the office would continue to review its assessment if and when new relevant facts become available.

In addition, Ms. Bensouda said her office remained concerned about ongoing civilian deaths, with reported executions by Da’esh accounting for the majority of those, although civilian deaths continue to also result from the Libya Dawn-Libya National Army conflict. Abductions, detentions and ill treatment in detention centres continued to be reported on all sides of the conflict, she said.

The Mediterranean-Libya migratory route to Europe remained a popular option among refugees and migrants who were particularly vulnerable to violence, sexual violence and ill treatment in Libya, the prosecutor also said. Detention of thousands of migrants continued to be a source of financing for many militant groups in Libya, she added.

“We, as the international community, must take a closer look at who profits from criminal activity in Libya, and take coordinated steps to prevent further violations,” said Ms. Bensouda. “This must be a priority for all who are affected by the criminal trafficking of human beings.”

For its part, she said her office continued to carefully evaluate how to best utilize its limited resources to maximize its impact on the present situation in Libya. While the office was continuing its investigations into officials linked to the former reign of Muammar Mohammad Abu Minyar Gaddafi, it was also focused on ongoing crimes in Libya.

Her office was also optimistic that, in the coming months, it would be able to resume its functions in Libya, and accelerate efforts to bring to justice those responsible for Rome Statute crimes, in coordination with key partners in and outside of Libya.

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Her office was also optimistic that, in the coming months, it would be able to resume its functions in Libya, and accelerate efforts to bring to justice those responsible for Rome Statute crimes, in coordination with key partners in and outside of Libya.

“I must reiterate that until my team is able to carry out investigations in Libya, and until the issue of resources is resolved, the Office will simply be unable to advance the investigations as rapidly as desired,” the prosecutor stressed.

In conclusion, Ms. Bensouda urged the Council and the international community to stay committed to Libya and “help it emerge triumphant in the face of adversity.”

“Libya and the Libyan people deserve peace and stability on which to secure and build their future; they deserve the rule of law and by the law rather than lawlessness and the current climate of perpetual insecurity and influx,” she said.
“Nations are not built overnight, but to last and to withstand the challenges of the 21st century they must be built on strong foundations. Justice will always serve as a central pillar,” she concluded.

UN envoy for Syria tells Security Council peace talks will resume ‘as soon as feasible’

26 May – The United Nations envoy for Syria today told the Security Council that he intends to begin the next round of intra-Syrian talks ‘as soon as feasible, but certainly not within the next two to three weeks,’ the Organization reported today.

A note for the press, issued by the Office of the Spokesman for the UN Secretary-General said that UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, briefed the Security Council in closed-door consultations, the first such discussions since the conclusion of the latest round of talks in Geneva and since the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) met in Vienna on 17 May.

He briefed the 15-member body on his intention to start the next round of the UN-mediated talks as soon as feasible but certainly not within the next two to three weeks. Meanwhile, the note said, Mr. de Mistura will maintain close and continuous contact with the Syrian parties as well as the members of the ISSG before determining the "appropriate time" to reconvene the parties to Geneva.

The Council’s consultations followed a joint press stake-out earlier today in Geneva between Mr. de Mistura and his Senior Advisor, Jan Egeland, where Mr. de Mistura noted that violence was continuing on the ground and the humanitarian situation was deteriorating.

He said the issue of air drops had been discussed amply and at length today by the Humanitarian Task Force and with the participation by video teleconference of the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), Ertharin Cousin.

He noted that it had been clearly decided at the recent meeting in Vienna that if by the first of June there was no movement on some of the many areas that need to be reached by land, the option of air drops, air lifting and air bridging “should be taken seriously into account.” Noting that six weeks of air drops is the equivalent of one convoy by land, Mr. de Mistura said the regions included both areas besieged by the Government or the opposition, such as Kefraya and Foua, as well as by the Government, such as Darayya and Moadameva.

He noted that WFP had done “excellent work” in preparing concrete plans in order to be able to educate and inform all members of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) who are responsible for the delivery of what they indicated was going to be an option. The ISSG comprises the United States, the Russian Federation, the UN, the Arab League, the European Union, and 16 other countries and has been working since late last year to resolve the Syrian crisis.

“It is clear from the briefing that we got from the WFP Executive Director that in order for the air drops in particular to become concrete, either by delivery at high altitude, as has been done in Deir ez-Zor, or by helicopters, landing where there is no possibility of [a safe air drop], there is a need for the cooperation of the Government of Syria,” Mr. de Mistura stressed.

The envoy noted that the Syrian Government had cooperated “very happily and with a lot of energy” for air drops in Deir ez-Zor, which had reached 110,000 people.

The Government had also authorized and cooperated with the Iranian military authorities for air drops or air lifts by helicopters of Iranian military to the two locations of Kafraya and Foua.

“So the logic would be, since they are all Syrian civilians, Syrian people, the same type of authorization would be expected
to be delivered for other places where Syrian civilians are present, such as Darayya, such as Moadameyah and Duma,” Mr. de Mistura said.

The envoy also noted that there had also been credible reports today of severe malnutrition of children in areas such as Moadameyah, and perhaps even in Al-Wa'er, which he emphasized should further heighten the sense of urgency.

“Now, we still believe that the best way is to do it by road, but the option of air drops [or] airlifts are and needs to be concretely there,” he said.

In addition, Mr. de Mistura stressed that if 110,000 people were able to be reached with 700 tons by air drops, there is “no reason that we should not be in a position of arguing strongly and pushing for having similar or equivalent type of access in order to reach every other civilian, wherever they are, inside Syria.”

Also speaking at the briefing was Mr. de Mistura’s Senior Advisor Jan Egeland, who stressed that the month of May continued to be “much more difficult than we have hoped.”

“May was supposed to be a good month. We were supposed to have procedures with the Government and with armed opposition groups that would make it possible for us to reach a million people by land in addition to the 110,000 people by air in Deir-ez Zor,” Mr. Egeland said.

He said that only 160,000 of the planned one million people that had been attempted to be reached by land in May had thus far been reached.

The advisor stressed that even in areas where there had been full approval from the Government, there had been “infinite problems” in actually reaching the places, while in other areas where there were conditional approvals, such as in Darayya and Duma, it had not been possible to reach people at all.

“We are still failing the people of Darayya, as we are failing the people of Moadamyia and Al-Waer,” he said. “Those are indeed three places, I would say, that the situation is still horrendously critical.”

Mr. Egeland stressed that children in those places are so malnourished they will die if assistance does not reach them.

“There are, however, a lot of important humanitarian activities happening, and it is happening in a more difficult security climate as well. There is more fighting, there is more bombing, there is more infighting in many areas and that has made it much more difficult to be an aid worker,” he said.

Mr. Egeland also noted that UN colleagues in Aleppo had to move from place to place to be able to survive in and continue to be present in the besieged city.

He said the “UN hub” had been repeatedly hit, he said, and staff had been denied going to some places because the access route had not been cleared or was not safe, or because there was fighting in those places.

“We need an end to hostilities to be able to reach many of these places,” Mr. Egeland stressed.

He noted, however, that vaccination campaigns were proceeding, with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) reporting a “massive ongoing effort” in Government-controlled areas, in areas controlled by opposition groups, and even in the so-called Islamic State-controlled areas.

The agencies were hoping to reach two million children through their efforts, and 1,400 teams were being prepared to be able to reach their goals, Mr. Egeland said.

“It’s a massive effort and we hope it will be successful. The next few weeks will decide,” he said.
LDCs: Behind the scenes – gearing up for a UN conference on least developed countries

26 May – Collaborating on the organization of major international conferences is a task well known to the United Nations, whose staff have the responsibility of ensuring that key messages are successfully delivered to not only those on location, but also worldwide.

This week alone, two summits in Turkey have been organized with the support of the Turkish Government; first the World Humanitarian Summit which ended on Tuesday, and starting tomorrow, in the coastal city of Antalya, the Midterm Review of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPOA).

The 10-year plan was developed to give impetus to economic and social development in some of the world's most vulnerable States. The category of least developed countries (LDCs) was officially established in 1971 by the UN General Assembly to attract special international support to disadvantages members of the UN family.

The current list includes 34 in Africa, 13 in Asia and the Pacific, and one in Latin America. The newest to have joined is South Sudan.

Today in Antalya, the technical arrangements for ensuring that the global IPOA conference can be followed by millions of viewers were being tweaked. Crucial services include interpretation in the six official languages of the Organization.

Sophie Louyot, the UN chief interpreter, is leading a team of 49 language experts. She started in 1982 as an interpreter herself and has been on many missions to major UN conferences. The UN News Centre asked her to explain the difference between covering an international meeting at the world body's New York Headquarters, as opposed to one in a remote location.

“First of all, we are in a hotel, so there are no [interpreters'] booths in the rooms,” Ms. Louyot noted. “So they put in chairs and brought mobile booths from outside. They're not the perfect size, they're not isolated correctly, they're not ventilated correctly, but the sound is good, which is the main priority.”

Despite these challenges, she said her dedicated and professional crew of linguists is adapting well because the change of scenery helps break their usual routine.

“Because they're in Antalya, because the surroundings are different, because it's beautiful outside, everything is easier in a way to accept the conditions they're working under,” she assured, speaking from one of the hotel rooms redesigned as an “interpreter lounge” through Sunday.

The voices of all these women and men can be heard in English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Russian and Arabic anywhere in the world on UN Web TV. The broadcast service is also on demand for those in different time zones.

Andreas Damianou, the Chief of that unit, welcomed the UN News Centre into their makeshift space. In less than one day, he has transformed the hotel bar into a broadcast studio.

“We are in one of the main parts of the hotel,” he said. “Actually, it used to be a disco, and we're turning it into a UN webcast room. We set up encoders where we can stream live, simultaneously three meeting or events.”

Four computers are required for each event; two are used for the live stream – one for English and the other for the original language – while the others serve to archive the footage for the on demand service.
Mr. Damianou is working with eight local volunteers who were selected by a Turkish event planning company. They all have very different backgrounds, as the only requirement was to speak English. The rest they learned during a four day training, which was organized in Istanbul prior to the World Humanitarian Summit.

“The hardest part is that we need to be very quick,” said 22-year-old Selim Pars, who recently completed her undergraduate studies in genetics, but was eager to gain a different kind of experience before starting a Master's degree.

She said she is learning the lingo of the broadcast world, and how to work under the pressure of live demands.

“I also get to hear all the speeches, and that's why I'm learning. For example, from the people who govern the countries, like the important people,” she chuckled. “I'm also learning about the current issues in the world and how people are trying to find a solution. It is quite interesting.”

As the day winds down in Antalya, with last minute tweaks to speeches, colorful signs being propped up and security scanners placed at the head of long hotel corridors, those working behind the scenes can now get just a few hours shut eye before the opening drum roll of a crucial conference that will discuss issues of direct concern to more than 880 million people living in some of the world's most vulnerable countries.

UN health agency launches programme for outbreaks and humanitarian emergencies

26 May – At the World Health Assembly taking place in Geneva this week, Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) have agreed to establish a new Health Emergencies Programme that will add operational capabilities for outbreaks and humanitarian emergencies that complement the health agency’s traditional technical and normative roles.

The new programme is designed to deliver rapid, predictable and comprehensive support to countries and communities as they prepare for, face or recover from emergencies caused by any type of hazard to human health, whether disease outbreaks, natural or human-made disasters or conflicts, WHO said in a news release.

With 130 million people in need of humanitarian assistance worldwide and health emergencies at an all-time high, WHO is “encouraged by our member States’ agreement to our new Health Emergencies Programme. This is an important step towards WHO becoming a truly operational agency – as requested by our member States – to complement our technical and normative role,” said Dr. Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General.

The World Health Assembly, which meets every May, is attended by delegations from all WHO member States. As the agency’s decision-making body, its main functions are to determine the policies of the health agency, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.

WHO noted that member States including Australia, Germany, Japan and Sweden, stepped forward with financial support for the new programme. The Government of Japan committed $50 million to support WHO’s emergencies work.

“I particularly welcome the contribution of $50 million from the Government of Japan, a sign of confidence in our new Health Emergencies Programme from a long-standing supporter of WHO’s work in emergencies,” Dr. Chan said.

The funds from Japan will include $20 million for 2016 and $10 million for each of the following three years. The $50 million is in addition to Japan’s recent contribution of $18.6 million for WHO’s work in emergencies for 2016.
WHO is already working with partners to support countries in several emergency settings with its new approach, including the global response to the Zika virus, as well as the response to the yellow fever outbreak in Angola and the health consequences of drought in Ethiopia.

Under the new programme, WHO will provide leadership within the context of the international health regulations and health, in relation to the broader humanitarian and disaster-management system. As health cluster lead, it will draw on the respective strengths and expertise of a wide range of partners and Member States.

In order to fulfil these new responsibilities, delegates agreed to a budget of $494 million for the new programme for 2016-2017. This is an increase of $160 million to the existing programme budget for WHO’s work in emergencies.

An Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the new programme was also established. At the World Health Assembly, Member States requested Dr. Chan to report to next year’s session on progress made in establishing and operationalizing the programme.

**Ban appoints governing body of ‘technology bank’ for least developed nations**

26 May – Ahead of a major United Nations conference on priorities for the world’s least development countries (LDCs), Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has announced the appointment of members to a governing council that will provide support towards the operationalization of a proposed Technology Bank for those vulnerable nations.

In a note to correspondents issued today by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson highlighted that a dedicated trust fund has also been set up to support the preparatory phase of the Technology Bank in the lead-up to its establishment by the General Assembly.

The trust fund is open to contributions from Member States and other stakeholders, including the private sector and foundations.

This announcement comes hours before the opening in Antalya, Turkey, of the three-day Midterm Review of the 2011 Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA), which set out a vision and strategy for the sustainable development of LDCs through 2020.

The Secretary-General established a High-Level Panel in November 2014 to study the scope and functions of a proposed new Technology Bank and dedicated to helping LDCs advance out of poverty.

For its part, the Governing Council will “formulate principles and policies governing the activities and operations of the mechanism, including preparing its Charter for consideration and adoption by the General Assembly,” the note said.

The Governing Council will be chaired by Mohamed H.A. Hassan (Sudan), President of the InterAcademy Partnership and former Chairman of the Council of the UN University.

In addition, Gyan Chandra Acharya (Nepal), Under Secretary-General and High Representative of the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, will be the Secretary-General’s representative in the body, serving as vice-chair.

Abdoulaye Yero Balde, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Guinea and Professor Zakri Abdul Hamid, Science Adviser to the Prime Minister of Malaysia and member of the Secretary-General’s Scientific Advisory Board, will also form part of the governing council.
Other members of the Governing Council are listed here.

The Istanbul action plan called for the establishment of a Technology Bank and a Science, Technology and Innovation Supporting Mechanism dedicated to least developed countries.

“This has been a long-standing priority of the LDCs confirmed in the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda and in Sustainable Development Goal 17,” the spokesperson’s note said.

The Government of Turkey has offered to host the Technology Bank in Gebze, Turkey.

‘Old habits die hard,’ UN deputy chief tells Environment Assembly, urging action towards sustainability

26 May – United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson stressed today the need for Member States to redouble efforts at prevention – whether to combat climate change, build resilience or address potential conflict flashpoints before they reach a tipping point.

“The decisions you will take are critical for the well-being of this and future generations,” he said at the opening of the high-level segment of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-2).

He said that the cost of crossing critical-level environmental thresholds would far exceed the amount spent to prevent such disasters.

He also said that environmental concerns must be addressed in a much more integrated and horizontal way as they are inextricably connected to economic considerations, to social development, to human rights, to the rule of law and matters of peace and security.

Moving away from fossil fuels will be difficult even though promising alternatives exist. People still think that they must choose between economic growth and environmental protection. “Old habits die hard and old powerful interests do not cede ground willingly,” he said.

“I have mediated in many conflicts. You now have an opportunity to mediate peace with nature, an historic negotiation,” he said.

Held in Nairobi at the headquarters of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the UNEA is the world’s most powerful decision-making body on the environment. This year, leaders will seek to pass a raft of resolutions, including those on food waste, the fading health of oceans, the world’s natural capital, and sustainable consumption and production.

“We are proud to have seen thousands of actions, people and initiatives congregate here over the years,” said UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner. “At Rio+20, Heads of State called for a new era in environmental governance, for a new environment assembly. You are that dream come true.”

More than one thousand delegates from across the world – including business and civil society representatives – are attending attend UNEA-2.

“Over the last two decades, we have seen, across the world, a movement emerge saying that the environment can no longer be a tertiary concern, that building a sustainable future cannot be an afterthought,” said Kenya’s President Uhuru Kenyatta.

Many of the speakers at the opening promised to back the fight against the illegal trade in wildlife and welcomed Kenya’s decision to earlier this month burn over 100 tonnes of poached ivory – the largest burn in history.
Negotiations on draft resolutions will continue until late Friday evening. The resolutions will set the path for much of UNEP’s work for the next few years and provide momentum to early actions on achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change.

**Iraq: civilians in besieged Fallujah at ‘extreme risk,’ senior UN humanitarian official warns**

26 May – Humanitarian agencies on the ground in Iraq are warning that civilians in the city of Fallujah—which has been under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) for more than two years— are at extreme risk, the United Nations humanitarian coordinator for Iraq has said.

“We are receiving distressing reports of civilians trapped inside Fallujah who are desperate to escape to safety, but can’t,” said Lise Grande, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq. “Parties to the conflict are obliged to uphold international humanitarian law and do everything possible to protect civilians and ensure they receive lifesaving assistance,” she added.

Since 22 May, 800 people have reached safety, mostly from outlying areas, and some families report having to walk for hours under harrowing conditions to reach safety. People trapped in the city centre are thought to be most at risk and unable to flee. At least 50,000 people are thought to remain in the city, and the few people who have left Fallujah report that conditions are dire, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“Food supplies are limited and tightly controlled. Medicines are exhausted and many families have no choice but to rely on dirty and unsafe water sources,” said Ms. Grande. “We want to tell the people of Fallujah that humanitarians are doing everything we can to provide assistance wherever they are and to advocate for their safety.”

Humanitarian partners have been gearing up for weeks to provide protection, shelter, water, health care and food assistance to people fleeing the city. Iraqi authorities have already established camps in Ameriyat al Falluja, 30 kilometres south of Fallujah, to house people who may displace.

“The UN and its partners have humanitarian teams and supplies on the ground. We’ve already begun providing people with food, water and shelter as they arrive and we’ll be there as more people arrive,” said Ms. Grande.

The UN estimates that 10 million people in Iraq need some form of humanitarian assistance, including 3.4 million people who have been displaced since January 2014. An additional three million people are thought to be living under ISIL control. More than 650,000 displaced people have returned to their homes since early 2015, many to areas partially or nearly completely destroyed, according to OCHA.

The Iraq humanitarian appeal for 2016 requested $861 million, although only 30 per cent has been funded to date, the humanitarian coordinator said.

“It’s heart-breaking that so many people need help and that we can’t do what’s necessary because we don’t have the minimum funding we require,” said Ms Grande.

Humanitarian partners estimate that $300 million is needed by July to sustain first-line emergency response across the country.
‘We have an opportunity in the next 15 to 20 years to really change our world’ – UN envoy for the least developed countries

26 May – Starting on Friday, the 48 least developed countries (LDCs) of the world will be the focus of a global United Nations conference in Antalya, Turkey, that aims to review their progress over the past five years.

In 2011, the international community adopted the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) which charts a vision and strategy for the sustainable development of LDCs for the next decade; half way into it, this Midterm Review will take stock of successes, challenges, and lessons learned.

Participation is expected at the highest political level, with representatives from governments, the private sector, multilateral organizations, civil society, and academia. It will result in an inter-governmentally negotiated and agreed outcome in the form of a political declaration.

According to the UN Office that supports the world’s most vulnerable nations (OHRLLS), the LDCs represent the poorest and weakest segment of the international community, comprising more than 880 million people (12 per cent of the global population) and often suffer from governance crisis, political instability and, in some cases, internal and external conflicts.

We should help these countries build their own resilience so they can deal with crises.

The category of LDCs was officially established in 1971 by the UN General Assembly to attract special international support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the UN family. The current list of LDCs includes 34 in Africa, 13 in Asia and the Pacific and 1 in Latin America. The newest to have joined is South Sudan.

The UN News Centre sat down for an interview with the Under-Secretary-General for the Least Developed Countries, Gyan Chandra Acharya, who is also the High Representative for Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

News Centre: Mr. Acharya, since your appointment in 2012, how has the situation for people living in LDCs changed?

Mr. Acharya: We have mixed results in terms of how far the LDCs have been able to go in terms of meeting the IPoA targets, the goals. If you look at the overall poverty level, yes it has reduced, but it has not reduced the way it should be reducing. Same thing with the economic growth, yes, the target was to have a seven per cent economic growth in the LDCs, but only 12 out of 48 countries have had seven per cent or more growth in the last five years. Overall economic growth was about 4.3 per cent in 2012, and now it is about 5.3 per cent. But the challenge is that it is volatile, so there is no steady progress.

The other challenge is whether this has really impacted poverty eradication. So the short answer to your question is that yes, there has been progress, but the progress is not uniform across the LDCs. Our effort in the conference is to look at how to accelerate the progress where there has been progress, and how to make sure that all the countries can continue on the path to progress in the next five years.

News Centre: Have there been countries in the last five years that have left the categorization of LDC?
Mr. Acharya: Yes, Samoa is a very good example of that and it has come out of the LDC status in the last five years. But there are many which are in the pipeline as well. I think this is a good sign. Many countries, almost ten countries, are about to meet or have just met the “graduation criteria.” It is also a good sign of some of the structural changes taking place in the LDCs.

The progress is not uniform across the LDCs

I would also like to stress that irrespective of the criteria, there are countries in the LDCs which are saying that they want to graduate out of the LDC status. This shows their aspirations to graduate, which means that the countries will make an extra effort and we are trying to help them as much as possible through international support, how best they can accelerate that process in the days ahead.

News Centre: Speaking of international support, do you feel that the global community is paying enough attention to these LDCs?

Mr. Acharya: [The world] is paying attention, that is true, because if you look at many of the global agendas that have come out in the last several years, not only the IPoA but also the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, there is good attention that has been paid to the challenges of the least developed countries.

But what has been a big challenge for us is that while there has been a lot of commitment, the delivery on that commitment has been a big issue. Part of the reason is of course that the global economy is not doing very well, but the other part of the issue is whether the international community is providing a coordinated and enhanced level of support to the LDCs or not.

News Centre: Many of the LDCs are facing major humanitarian crises. How do you balance the need for immediate humanitarian relief and longer-term development assistance?

News Centre: The LDCs conference is happening now because we’re at the midpoint of the programme of action dedicated to their development. What is the most important thing you want to see happen at the event?

Mr. Acharya: In terms of the timing it is very important. The idea of the review is really to look at the success stories – and where there have been successes, we want to really make sure that those successes are maintained, they are scaled up, and they are replicated. And where we see the obstacles, we would really like to see what has been the major challenge for these countries in terms of meeting the goals.

What we are also looking at from the conference is what the international community can do better. This is important because we live in a very integrated and globalized world, and the challenge of the LDCs is not only a concern for the LDCs. We live in a world where we have principles of international solidarity, this is the fundamental basis of the United Nations which promotes peace and development and human rights in an inclusive manner, and integrated manner all around the world. What we are saying is that there is a huge opportunity in the LDCs.

If we work together, we can achieve very ambitious goals

We are talking about 12 per cent of the population, we’re talking about huge natural resources, but we have not been able to really fully utilize those natural resources, so there is an opportunity for all of us to really lift the world up and eradicate poverty. And you cannot eradicate poverty if you do not look at those countries which are at the bottom of the development ladder.

News Centre: You mention that countries will be learning from each other. Aside from Samoa, which countries have ‘lessons learned’ to share?

Mr. Acharya: There are many countries! For example, Bangladesh, Nepal and Tanzania have made a lot of progress on reducing maternal mortality and child mortality in the last several years. Look at Ethiopia for its economic growth and Rwanda for the change in terms of access to energy as well as the internet. If you look at Bhutan, it has promoted huge
hydro-electric projects, and Laos is also making huge progress.

News Centre: What is the most important piece of information you want the public to know?

Mr. Acharya: We have an opportunity in the next 15 to 20 years to really change our world. Now when I say change our world I mean to eradicate poverty, and have very strong economic as well as social bases in the countries. We believe that that opportunity must be seized by focusing our attention with enhanced levels of collaboration in these countries which are far, far away from meeting the goals on their own. We believe that this is one more opportunity to have a dedicated discussion on their challenges. Now that we have a global framework, and now that we have global attention with a very positive vibe, if we work together, we can achieve very ambitious goals. We are hopeful that we will continue to give focus on these countries.

In Republic of Korea, Ban urges Asian nations to settle border disputes, historical issues

26 May – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on all Asian countries to deepen dialogue, expand cooperation, and address border disputes, historical issues and threats to stability on the Korean Peninsula.

“This powerful continent is critical for prosperity and security around the world,” Mr. Ban told the Forum for Peace and Prosperity held in Jeju, Republic of Korea.

Noting at the same time that Asia accounts for nearly a third of all global greenhouse gas emissions, he stressed the importance of concerted action. Citing solar power and other innovative green technologies, he said “Asia is also a source of solutions.”

Mr. Ban went on to urge all Asian countries to quickly ratify the Paris Agreement on climate change, as only 16 of the 177 signatories have ratified it.

Asia’s robust economic growth helped the world cut poverty by half – and achieve the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG). But two out of every three of the world’s poorest people live in Asia – a total of 450 million individuals. The continent faces major threats related to freshwater, land and pollution, he warned.

“That is why Asia must embrace the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” he said.

There are many hopeful things. Four of our five top contributors to UN peacekeeping operations are in Asia. The Asia-Pacific region continues to be a centre of economic dynamism and influence. It is also home to political progress and greater democratization.

But there are challenges. A number of Asian countries claim the same territory and maritime areas, he said, calling on all parties to resolve their disputes peacefully. “It is time to agree on borders that are now disputed,” he said.

And Asian countries must rise above conflicting interpretations of history. By squarely and humbly addressing the unfortunate past historical issues, they can focus on the future, he stressed, adding that other continents, such as Latin America, Africa and Europe, have done that work through successful agreements and organizations.

Mr. Ban also spotlighted the importance of nurturing youth into global citizens because “national geographic borders do not
Turning to the situation on the Korean Peninsula, he noted that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles only undermines its own security and hurts its citizens. Military spending remains high while children are wasting. Human rights are systematically abused. The country’s authorities must correct these wrongs, Mr. Ban stressed.

While welcoming progress made in the protection and promotion of human rights in Asia, he also expressed concern about shrinking space for civil society organizations, as well as rising intolerance, hate speech and violence in parts of Asia.

Many Asian countries showed compassion by hosting migrants, he said, calling on these nations to “give new arrivals the chance to make a difference.”

Mr. Ban will travel to Ise-Shima, Japan, tomorrow, 27 May, to participate in the Outreach Session of the G-7 Summit.

The Secretary-General will return to the Republic of Korea for the opening session, on Monday, 30 May, of the UN DPI/NGO Conference in the south-eastern city of Gyeongju.

**INTERVIEWS: Top UN peacekeeping, logistical officials discuss threats to 'blue helmets'**

26 May – In extreme circumstances like deliberate targeting by jihadists and traffickers to more complicated assignments, today's United Nations peacekeepers need courage, a high degree of professionalism and resilience, the head of the so-called 'blue helmets' today said.

“Being a peacekeeper has always been about devoting a period of time of one's life to the noble ideals of peace and security. But it has taken a very specific dimension in recent years in view of the very dangerous situations in which we've been asked to step in,” Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told the UN News Centre ahead of the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, marked annually on 29 May.

Just days before the interivew, five Chadian peacekeepers were killed and three others wounded in an attack in northern Mali. The attack by Islamic extremists, condemned by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as “heinous,” was also denounced by the Security Council.

This year's theme is “Honouring our Heroes,” a nod to the 125,000 military, police and civilian staff who serve in 16 peacekeeping operations around the world. The deployment is the largest in UN history.

**UN Honours our Heroes on Peacekeeping Day. Credit: United Nations**

At least 37 UN peacekeepers have been killed in the last four months. Since the start of UN peacekeeping operations in 1948, nearly 3,500 military, police and civilian personnel working under the UN flag have been killed, including 129 in 2015 alone.

Those 129 individuals were honoured last week with Dag Hammarskjöld Medals. In a special ceremony, the family of Captain Mbaye Diagne, whose bravery in Rwanda saved hundreds of people from genocide, was presented with an inaugural medal for exceptional courage in his name.
The 2016 commemoration marked the eighth straight year in which the UN has honoured more than 100 peacekeepers who lost their lives in the previous year in the line of duty.

“They are sacrificing their lives in the effort to bring peace and security to those who have otherwise been deprived of it,” said Atul Khare, the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, whose Department works closely with the Department of Peacekeeping.

Mr. Khare is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the staff in UN Missions have the required food, water, camps, vehicles, fuel and other logistics so that they can do their jobs.

Among his goals is to work in a “more efficient, more effective and more responsible manner,” Mr. Khare told the UN News Centre.

That means using a greater focus on technology and innovation, and working in closer partnership with local, regional and international groups to plan and share information.

**Greater responsibility to partners, hosts and future generations**

“National ownership, consent of parties and impartiality. Those are the guiding principles of UN Peacekeeping and all the peacekeepers follow them,” noted Mr. Khare.

He emphasized the word “responsibility” throughout the interview. He noted, for example, that his Department has the “responsibility to ensure that the mandates are actually met,” referring to the official order agreed upon by the Security Council on what the Mission will aim to do in a country. That responsibility extends to the countries that are providing the financial and human resources to the Mission.

The senior UN official also discussed the responsibility to the host country, referring also to the ethical conduct of peacekeepers.

“Wherever the peacekeepers are deployed the normal social contract has broken down,” he said. “In those parts where the conflict is rife, where the chances of corruption, the chances of fraud, the chances of sexual violence and conflict are all high, we must demonstrate so that those countries can, through our example partially, come back to normalcy.”

Mr. Khare, who is a former peacekeeper, also spoke about the responsibility to future generation to not use natural resources in excess and use as many renewable sources of energy as possible.

“We must respect the principle of doing no harm and that includes the necessity of looking at environment promotion and protection while we are deployed,” he said.

**'Few contaminating the image of many'**

A threat to UN peacekeeping also comes from some UN peacekeepers allegedly sexually exploiting and abusing the people who they are meant to protect.

“The totally unacceptable behavior of a few contaminates the image and the courage of the vast, vast majority of the colleagues,” Mr. Ladsous said.

“It's also true to say that the countries that contribute the troops and police have never given to the UN the power to investigate or prosecute,” he continued. The UN now has a policy of naming the countries that are cited in allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Among the topics that have been discussed to penalize such actions is for the alleged perpetrator to face a court martial in the country where the purported act occurred, as opposed to him being repatriated back to his home country.
Another idea is for criminal sanctions against the home country of the peacekeeper, with the aim of increasing checks on who is allowed to wear a UN uniform and his actions during that time.

The UN Secretariat is expediting guidance that will set out factors relevant to the decision to repatriate a military or formed police unit when there is credible evidence of widespread and systemic sexual exploitation and abuse.

The guidance will also detail the criteria for determining that a troop-contributing country has not taken appropriate steps to investigate allegations, or that a police or troop-contributing country has not held perpetrators accountable or informed the Secretary-General of the progress of investigations and follow-up action.

“No State can allow a peacekeeper to turn into a predator,” Mr. Khare said.

The main focus, both Mr. Ladsous and Mr. Khare stressed, needs to be on providing immediate assistance to the victim – medical and psychological – to help her or him overcome the drama.

A trust fund to support the provision of services to victims is operational, and that Member States have been requested to consider making contributions.

These efforts are overseen by Jane Holl Lute, the Special Coordinator on improving the UN response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

**UN launches campaign to urge 'smart' transition to sustainable cities**

26 May – Two United Nations entities have launched a global initiative to advocate for public policy that will promote use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a catalyst for the transition to smart sustainable cities.

The initiative, the United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC), will assist the response to Goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.”

Led by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the initiative is open to all UN agencies, municipalities, industry, academia and other relevant stakeholders, and will focus on the integration of ICTs in urban operations and build on existing international standards and key performance indicators.

Many UN bodies have expressed their intention to join the Advisory Board of the U4SSC global initiative.

“ICTs have become central to innovation in almost every sphere of social and economic activity, making collaboration essential in maximizing the contribution of ICTs to sustainable development,” said ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao.

“We live in a connected world and we see new fascinating markets and products where physical products and services and digital technologies merge and move together,” said ECE Executive Secretary Christian Friis Bach.

“The digital revolution can help us create intelligent transport, smart energy systems, resource efficiency and transparent and open societies. It can help us create sustainable development. However, to achieve this we need trust and predictability, and we need common and neutral standards that can work across borders and technologies,” he added.
The U4SSC was launched at the ITU-ECE Forum on “Shaping smarter and more sustainable cities: striving for sustainable development goals” held in Rome, Italy, 18-19 May.

ITU and ECE presented a set of key performance indicators they have developed to measure the “smartness” and “sustainability” of cities, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Dubai, Singapore, Manizales, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Valencia, Rimini and other selected cities have already agreed to trial these key performance indicators.

The forum concluded with the Rome Declaration, which presents a 10-point manifesto for the transition to smart sustainable cities. The declaration promotes the use of internationally agreed key performance indicators and technical standards in service of sustainable development objectives in the urban context, and highlights the value of inclusive e-governance models and peer-learning among city leaders.