Ban calls on UN Security Council for decisive steps to end attacks on hospitals, medical staff

28 September – Denouncing a surge in “horrific attacks” on hospitals, clinics and medical staff, most recently in the war-torn Syrian city of Aleppo, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the Security Council today to take decisive steps to end such obvious war crimes and hold the perpetrators accountable.

“Failure to act is an affront to our shared humanity. It undermines States’ legal obligations and the multilateral system as a whole,” he told the 15-member body at the start of a debate on the protection and health care facilities caught in armed conflict, noting that nearly 600 such attacks between 2014 and 2015 killed 959 people and injured more than 1,500.

“Most heinously, such attacks are often deliberate, to aggravate suffering and force people from contested territory,” he said, stressing that international law is clear that medical workers, facilities and transports must be protected and the wounded and sick, civilians and fighters alike, must be spared.

“I urge you to overcome your divisions and meet your responsibilities to prevent and reduce conflict and to build peace and stability,” he added, listing attacks just from this May including one on a hospital in Hajjah, Yemen, where 19 people died, and a suicide bombing in Pakistan on Sandeman Provincial hospital which killed over 70, both last month.

In Syria, Aleppo now faces the most sustained and intense bombardment in the more than five years of conflict with hospitals, clinics, ambulances and medical staff under attack around the clock, and 95 per cent of medical personnel who...
were in the city before the war reported to have fled, been detained or killed.

“Deliberate attacks on hospitals are war crimes. Denying people access to essential health care violates international humanitarian law,” Mr. Ban stressed, outlining three recommendations to the Council.

First, with regard to prevention, Member States should do all they can to promote respect for medical care in armed conflict, aligning national legislation with international humanitarian law.

Secondly, on protection, Member States and parties to conflict must take precautions to safeguard medical facilities and personnel when they plan and conduct military operations, including in military orders, location of targets, issuing of advance warnings and evacuations.

Thirdly, on accountability, Member States and parties to conflict should ensure that those responsible for violations are prosecuted and punished, and provide reparations and support to those affected by such attacks.

“Failure to act is an affront to our shared humanity. It undermines States’ legal obligations and the multilateral system as a whole,” Mr. Ban declared.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) President Peter Maurer told the Council that States must strengthen domestic legislation to protect access to health care and ensure attacks are punished.

“Much stronger engagement is needed to turn your commitment into a reality on the ground, to make a real difference for people suffering in wars. I urge you to continue to push,” he said, referring to a Council resolution in May calling for enhanced protection for health care workers, the sick and wounded, hospitals and clinics in war zones.

“Just a few hours ago, the two largest hospitals in Aleppo were reportedly attacked. Patients were killed. Medical staff were injured. And all across the country, many hospitals are no longer functional, leaving injured people with little hope of getting life-saving medical assistance. The violence, the disruption of electricity and water supplies and the lack of medicines have severely jeopardized access to health care,” he warned.

‘No words left’ to describe suffering of children in Aleppo – UNICEF

28 September – Children in Aleppo are trapped in a “living nightmare,” a senior official of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said today, stressing yet again, the direness of the situation, particularly for the children, in Syria’s war-ravaged Aleppo.

“The children of Aleppo are trapped in a living nightmare,” said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth in a news release issued by the UN agency today.

“There are no words left to describe the suffering they are experiencing,” he added.

According to UNICEF, At least 96 children have been killed and 223 have been injured in eastern Aleppo since Friday.

The UN agency further said that the health system in eastern Aleppo is “crumbling” with just 30 or so doctors left, hardly any equipment or emergency medicine to treat the injured, and an ever increasing number of trauma cases. The UN agency added that according to doctors on the ground, children with low chances of survival are too often left to die due to limited capacity and supplies.
“Nothing can justify such assaults on children and such total disregard for human life. The suffering – and the shock among children – is definitely the worst we have seen,” underscored Mr. Forsyth in the statement.

Earlier this week, speaking at an emergency session of the Security Council, UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura strongly appealed to the Council’s membership – particularly permanent members Russia and the United States – to rescue the recently collapsed cessation of hostilities, help end the bloodshed and enable urgent aid into the iconic city, where, overall, some two million people remain trapped under a de facto siege.

Further, during the UN General Assembly’s annual high-level debate, many world leaders drew attention to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and urged all parties to the conflict to urgently pursue a political solution to the conflict.

**UN pays tribute to Shimon Peres, 'tireless' worker for Middle East peace**

**28 September** – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has paid tribute to Shimon Peres, former Israeli President and the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize winner, who passed away early Wednesday at the age of 93.

Offering condolences to his family and friends, and to the people of Israel, the Secretary-General said that “I am deeply saddened by the passing of Mr. Shimon Peres, the former President of the State of Israel.”

The UN chief noted that Mr. Peres played a central role in Israel's founding, and served his country throughout his life, not only as President but also Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Defence Minister and in other key roles.

“He worked tirelessly for a two-state solution that would enable Israel to live securely and harmoniously with the Palestinians and the wider region, a commitment duly recognized when he shared the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize with Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat,” Mr. Ban said, also noting that Mr. Peres was also a good partner of the UN, eager to see Israel contribute to the work of the international community.

The Secretary-General said he met Mr. Peres on many occasions, and always benefitted from his views. “Even in the most difficult hours, Mr. Peres remained an optimist about the prospects for reconciliation and peace,” he added.

The Secretary-General recalled Mr. Peres' remarks at the UN: “The time has come to comprehend that the real triumph is in the harvest of peace, not in the seeds of another war. When we replace war maps with peace maps, we will discover the differences were minimal. The wars were appalling. We shall see that the promised land could have become the land of promise a long time ago.”

The Secretary-General went on to wish that “may his spirit of determination guide us as we work to ensure peace, security and dignity for Israelis, Palestinians and all the peoples of the region.”

In her tribute to Mr. Peres, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Irina Bokova, said that "he was a great statesman, a great humanist, and a historic man of peace."

"Shimon Peres leaves an indelible mark on the history of the Middle East and, today, his message is more relevant than ever, to clear the path to peace and mutual respect across the region,” she said.

“A founder of the State of Israel, he remained until his very last days a man of ideas and values, a man of innovation and creative thinking, always searching to mobilize new hope and energy, always seeking new ways to promote dialogue and cooperation, especially through science, for which he was passionate,” she added.
UN health agency declares elimination of measles in the Americas

A nurse gives a measles vaccination to a child in Paraguay. Photo: WHO/PAHO

28 September – The region of the Americas is the first in the world to have eliminated measles, a viral disease that can cause severe health problems, the United Nations health agency has declared.

“This is an historic day for our region and indeed the world,” said Carissa F. Etienne, Director of the Pan American Health Organization of the UN World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) yesterday, noting that the achievement culminates a 22-year effort involving mass vaccination against measles, mumps and rubella throughout the Americas.

“It is proof of the remarkable success that can be achieved when countries work together in solidarity towards a common goal. It is the result of a commitment made more than two decades ago, in 1994, when the countries of the Americas pledged to end measles circulation by the turn of the 21st century,” she added.

The announcement was made during the 55th Directing Council of PAHO/WHO, which is currently under way and is being attended by ministers of health from throughout the Americas.

Measles is the fifth vaccine-preventable disease to be eliminated from the Americas, after the regional eradication of smallpox in 1971, poliomyelitis in 1994, and rubella and congenital rubella syndrome in 2015.

Before mass vaccination was initiated in 1980, measles caused nearly 2.6 million annual deaths worldwide. In the Americas, 101,800 deaths were attributable to measles between 1971 and 1979. A cost-effectiveness study on measles elimination in Latin America and the Caribbean has estimated that with vaccination, 3.2 million measles cases and 16,000 deaths between 2000 and 2020 will have been prevented in the region, WHO said.

“This historic milestone would never have been possible without the strong political commitment of our Member States in ensuring that all children have access to life-saving vaccines,” Ms. Etienne said.

“It would not have been possible without the generosity and commitment of health workers and volunteers who have worked so hard to take the benefits of vaccines to all people, including those in vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities. Indeed it would not have been possible without the strong leadership and coordination provided by PAHO, Regional Office for the Americas of WHO,” she added.

Process to eliminate measles

Measles transmission had been considered interrupted in the region since 2002, when the last endemic case was reported in the Americas. However, as the disease had continued to circulate in other parts the world, some countries in the Americas experienced imported cases, according to WHO.

The International Expert Committee for Documenting and Verifying Measles, Rubella, and Congenital Rubella Syndrome Elimination in the Americas reviewed evidence on measles elimination presented by all the countries of the region between 2015 and August 2016 and decided that it met the established criteria for elimination. The process included six years of work with countries to document evidence of the elimination.
Measles is one of the most contagious diseases and affects primarily children. It is transmitted by airborne droplets or via direct contact with secretions from the nose, mouth, and throat of infected individuals. Symptoms include high fever, generalized rash all over the body, stuffy nose, and reddened eyes. It can cause serious complications including blindness, encephalitis, severe diarrhoea, ear infections and pneumonia, particularly in children with nutritional problems and in immunocompromised patients.

WHO highlighted that as a result of global measles elimination efforts, only 244,704 measles cases were reported worldwide in 2015, representing a significant decline from earlier years. However, more than a half of these reported cases were notified in Africa and Asia.

To maintain measles elimination, PAHO/WHO and the International Expert Committee have recommended that all countries of the Americas strengthen active surveillance and maintain their populations’ immunity through vaccination.

“I would like to emphasize that our work on this front is not yet done,” warned Ms. Etienne. “It is critical that we continue to maintain high vaccination coverage rates, and it is crucial that any suspected measles cases be immediately reported to the authorities for rapid follow-up.”

PAHO, founded in 1902, works with its member countries to improve the health and the quality of life of the people of the Americas. It serves as the regional office for the Americas of WHO and is the specialized health agency of the inter-American system.

**Improved UN database spotlights huge global disparities in access to cancer care**

**28 September** – A revamped global database launched today by the United Nations atomic agency highlights startling disparities across the world when it comes to access to treatment and care for cancer.

“Data shows that, despite efforts to improve the situation in recent decades, a lot is still needed to provide adequate access to cancer care,” Joanna Izewska, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) Dosimetry Laboratory, in charge of the database, said in a news release today.

Conclusions inferred from the Directory of Radiotherapy Centres (DIRAC) show that most radiotherapy facilities are located in high-income countries and at least 36 countries do not have such radiotherapy facilities. The Directory draws data from 141 countries, including on radiotherapy machines, radiation sources, staff in radiotherapy centres as well as on the type and age of equipment.

According to the IAEA, The system has been redesigned to make it more user-friendly and to provide an integrated picture with better comparisons between countries and regions.

“Professionals worldwide rely on DIRAC and request information every day. It is a powerful tool for planning radiotherapy services and for advocating better access to cancer treatment in developing countries,” noted Ms. Izewska in the news release.

The IAEA further noted that the Directory has shown that thousands of additional radiotherapy machines and substantial staff training are required to cover the current gap in access to treatment in low- and middle-income countries. It added that according to estimates from a 2015 Lancet Oncology Report, some 50 per cent to 60 per cent of all cancer patients will need radiotherapy at some point during their treatment.

In addition, more than 300 radiotherapy machines registered in the database are older than 30 years and will need to be
replaced.

The IAEA has been collecting data on radiotherapy centres since 1959 and the data in DIRAC has been derived from the UN agency’s dosimetry audit services operated with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other audit networks, collected from radiotherapy centres, national databases and manufacturers.

The revamped portal was launched today on the margins of the IAEA General Conference, being held in Vienna, Austria from 26 to 30 September.

UN food relief agency reaches town in northern Iraq for first time in two years

28 September – For the first time in more than two years, the United Nations food relief agency has distributed urgently-needed food for people in and around the northern Iraqi town of Shirqat, which was under siege and cut off from humanitarian access from 2014 until earlier this month.

“Families in Shirqat are in a desperate need of humanitarian support after being cut off from the outside world for more than two years,” said Sally Haydock, Country Director in Iraq for the UN World Food Programme (WFP), in a news release.

“Thanks to a major contribution from USAID’s Food for Peace and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, WFP will be able to continue providing support for newly displaced families from the larger Mosul area,” she said.

WFP distributed a one-month supply of food for families in the Khadhraniya area of Shirqat through its local partner, Muslim Aid.

Residents of Shirqat – which is located 80 kilometres south of Mosul – have been living under very harsh conditions, struggling to access water, food, medical services and a functioning local market. WFP distributed rice, lentils, wheat flour, bulgur wheat, beans and vegetable oil for an initial 1,000 people. The agency plans to monitor the situation and support people in the town and surrounding villages over the coming weeks.

“This latest contribution of $25 million to WFP continues and reinforces our support to displaced and conflict-affected Iraqis,” said Douglas Silliman, United States Ambassador to the Republic of Iraq.

Mr. Silliman noted that since 2014, the United States, through the Office of Food for Peace of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has provided more than $113 million in life-saving emergency food assistance to the people of Iraq.

More than three million Iraqis have been displaced by conflict since mid-June 2014. In response, WFP has provided food assistance to more than one million vulnerable, displaced Iraqis across all 18 governorates.

WFP is scaling up its assistance to support people displaced from Mosul and surrounding areas in Iraq as part of an inter-agency humanitarian response. To continue assisting displaced families in Iraq until the end of the year, WFP said it urgently requires $68 million.
On World Day, UN urges rabies control beyond human and animal health services

**28 September** – Officials at the United Nations today urged human and animal health authorities around the world to step up and more effectively address rabies – a preventable but fatal disease that still claims the lives of an estimated 60,000 people each year – as the international community marks World Rabies Day.

“Prevention of bites in the first place should be an emphasis of any rabies programme. When a child gets bitten the mother needs to know to wash the wound and to contact a local health worker. Most people who get bitten are too poor to pay for treatment and for transportation to facilities that carry the vaccine. We also need to help countries with forecasting their vaccine needs and building emergency stocks,” said Bernadette Abela-Ridder, Head of Zoonotic Diseases at the World Health Organization (WHO), in a message to observe the Day.

World Rabies Day is celebrated annually to raise awareness about rabies prevention and to highlight progress in defeating the disease. In addition, 28 September marks the anniversary of the death of Louis Pasteur, the French chemist and microbiologist who developed the first rabies vaccine.

The theme for 2016 is 'Rabies: Educate. Vaccinate. Eliminate,' which emphasizes the two crucial actions that communities can do to prevent rabies. It also reflects the global target to eliminate all human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030.

Evidence suggests that the threat is especially prominent in areas struck by conflict and natural disasters. Experts have warned that unless coordination and awareness-raising go beyond the ministries of health and agriculture, too many animals and humans will continue to die unnecessarily from the disease, according to the Global Alliance for Rabies Control, a leading organization working for the global prevention of rabies. The organization partners with WHO and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), among others.

“People live, work and flee with their dogs. We need to change the way ministries work together to roll out regular mass dog vaccination campaigns, to provide more protection in times of peace, conflict and natural disasters,” said Louis Nel, Executive Director of the Global Alliance for Rabies Control. “We have the vaccines and we know they work, so how is it possible that so many people and animals continue to die from this painful, long-known disease?”

Though rabies is present in wildlife, more than 95 per cent of the disease is spread via dogs.

On the basis of data and evidence collected by the World Organisation for Animal Health, a rise in rabies cases among dogs has been observed in parallel to political instability periods in some North African countries during the past decade.
Republic of Korea: UN rights expert calls for probe in death of 69-year old protester

28 September – Expressing dismay over the death of a protestor who was injured by the police use of a water cannon on a peaceful rally last year in the country, a United Nations human rights expert has called for a full investigation into the incident and to ensure that such a “tragedy” is never repeated.

“I call for a full and independent investigation into the police’s use of water cannon during the rally of November 2015 that unambiguously led to Mr. Baek [Nam-gi]’s death according to video footage available,” United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association Maina Kiai said in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“The perpetrators should be held accountable and the family of Mr. Baek receive appropriate compensation; in addition, adequate measures must be taken to prevent a similar tragedy from happening in the future,” he added.

On 14 November 2015, Mr. Baek, a 69-year-old farmer, was injured by the use of water cannon while taking part in a peaceful rally in the country’s capital, Seoul, and remained in a coma until his passing on 25 September this year.

The Special Rapporteur also reiterated his recommendation made to the authorities in his country report of June this year to “review tactics used for the management of assemblies –including the use of water cannons and bus barricades – to ensure that they are not applied indiscriminately or against peaceful protestors, they do not result in escalation of tensions, and are directed at facilitating rather than preventing the exercise of assembly rights.”

He also echoed similar recommendations made in his joint report with the former Special Rapporteur on the extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns, on the proper management of public assemblies presented to the UN Human Rights Council in March this year.

In the news release, the UN rights expert expressed his condolences to the relatives and friends of Mr. Baek, and called on the authorities respect the will of the family not to have the body of Mr. Baek taken for autopsy.

According to OHCHR, the police and the Prosecutor’s Office had requested a warrant from the Seoul Central District Court to proceed with an autopsy as the cause of death is allegedly not clear, but it was denied by the court. They have reportedly filed another request.

Mr. Kiai’s call has been endorsed by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mr. Michel Forst; the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Mr. Juan Mendez; and the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, Mr. Baskut Tuncak.

Independent Experts and Special Rapporteurs, are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.
A settlement to Cypriot dispute ‘closer than ever before, but there’s still a way to go’ – UN Special Adviser

28 September – On 22 August 2014, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced that he had appointed Mr. Espen Barth Eide of Norway as his new Special Adviser on Cyprus, replacing Mr. Alexander Downer of Australia, who had stepped down four months earlier, in April.

In the statement that announced the appointment, the Secretary-General described Mr. Eide as a seasoned diplomat who would bring to the position “a deep understanding of peace processes and peacemaking.”

Mr. Eide has since been working to assist two sides – the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots – in search for a comprehensive and mutually acceptable settlement to the Cyprus problem.

On 25 September 2016, the UN Secretary-General held – on the margins of the UN General Assembly’s general debate – what he described to reporters as a “productive” meeting, with Mustafa Akýncý, Turkish Cypriot leader, and Nicos Anastasiades, Greek Cypriot leader.

Mr. Ban also said that in the meeting with the two leaders, they had discussed the state of play in the ongoing negotiations to reach a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus, and welcomed their joint commitment to intensify efforts even further, in order to achieve that settlement in 2016.

In an interview with the UN News Centre, Mr. Eide began by explaining the protracted and extremely complex history of the long running dispute in Cyprus.

Espen Barth Eide: The United Nations has been in Cyprus for 52 years. It so happens that I’m also 52 years old, and we were born in the same week – the [UN Peacekeeping Force, known as UNFICYP] and myself – and the UN came there because of the inter-communal strife in the early days of the independent Republic of Cyprus. And then 10 years later, there was a military coup, supported by the then military regime in Athens, and just after that, the Turkish invasion, and the de-facto division of the country into two parts.

And what we’re trying to do is to help the leaders – the Turkish-Cypriot and the Greek-Cypriot leader – to re-unify the country, under a federal-structure for Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots alike, and we have actually come quite far in that process. And I would strongly say, as the Secretary-General said yesterday, much further than any previous pair of leaders in all these years has come. So we are now approaching the final stretch and the make-or-break moment in the Cyprus process.

UN News Centre: So what is the current situation, and how has it evolved over the past 50 years?

Espen Barth Eide: Well, that’s a very long story. Of course there was a major attempt in 2004 – the so-called ‘Annan Plan,’ from former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan – which was presented to a referendum, and it got ‘yes’ in the North of Cyprus, but it lost quite significantly in the South. However, at that time, the final version of the plan was written by the UN, and neither leader on either side actually endorsed it.

... the current situation is unacceptable and must be overcome ... losing this opportunity is not good for you; neither for Cypriots nor for somebody trying to be helpful in the neighbourhood. So the region needs this and it is so close that to miss
this opportunity would be a historic failure.

So maybe, with hindsight, it was not that surprising that we got the outcome it gave. In this phase, which has lasted basically the last 16 months, since the current two leaders – Mr Mustafa Akýncý in the North, and Nicos Anastasiades in the South – started they have moved on all issues, and they have discussed all issues inter-dependently. And of the six chapters that encompass the negotiation track, four are largely done. And the two last ones, which are widely seen to be the more difficult ones, have been open for discussion even if we haven’t finally negotiated them. So we’re in a very advanced stage.

At the same time, I need to be honest saying that there’re outstanding issues. And what I detect now is [that] I recognize typical nervousness of the ‘last mile,’ because in any peace process, particularly those that worked, we have the experience that when you come to the crux of the matter, the really important accommodations that have to be made, both sides feel the pressure of time. And from the UN side, we’re insisting that we will not put pressure on them. It is not our problem; it is their problem, and we’re there to assist in overcoming their issue.

The process has to be leader-led; it has to be owned by the Cypriots themselves. But our job is to help them, to facilitate and, I would also say, coordinate the overall international effort, because it is not only us, the United Nations, it’s also the European Union, of which the future united Cyprus will be a member state, for instance. It’s the neighboring States – Greece and Turkey – who have a stake in this, because they’re, together with the United Kingdom, guarantors. So the international effort is coordinated through the UN, and my job now, together with the Secretary-General, is to orchestrate all these different pieces, so that we can achieve the noble goal of a settlement soon.

UN News Centre: There has been a breakthrough in the last couple of years – you’ve been in this job for two years – what broke the logjam to get us to where we’re now, which you say is really quite close to a final deal?

Espen Barth Eide: It’s closer than ever before, but there’s still a way to go. And I don’t want to leave the impression that a deal is around the corner, because we still have to settle a few, but important issues. Numerically speaking, most issues are behind us; they are done and settled. So we have a big body of agreement already there. Volume-wise, most of the deal is written down. However, per usual, the most difficult issues are not those you take first, so of course we need to create the space, and I don’t necessarily mean the physical space, but the framework in which we’re able to deal with those final issues, in an expedited but also efficient and proper manner. That’s what we’re looking for right now.

But I want to say that the main answer – there’s one main answer and then there are many smaller answers to the big question – why does it look like it is working? It is the leadership of the two leaders we currently have: Mr. Anastasiades, who was elected the President of Cyprus – which also means the leader of the Greek Cypriot community – and we work with him as the leader of the Greek Cypriot community. He was elected in 2013, on a pro-settlement mandate – he ran for his post arguing that he would use the post to try to arrive at a settlement; Mr. Mustafa Akýncý, who was elected in the South in April 2015, likewise got a very solid mandate – 60.5 percent – on running for one main course, which is to bring this tragic division of the island to an end.

So we have two leaders who, actually, are declared settlement supporters and who are working in honesty with each other as partners, to solve this. Their challenge is that on both sides, there are a number of people who are, to put it very diplomatically, less enthusiastic about the prospect of the settlement. So it’s not enough for these two leaders to agree with each other; they also have to bring along a majority of each side. And in my daily interaction with the leaders, I also recognize and empathize with their constant sense that, I have to be able to convince my community to vote yes, because there was a referendum last time, and there will be a referendum again, and history has proven that you can’t know the outcome of a referendum, and they want to be secure.

So the leadership and the trust that have been developed between the leaders is the main answer. Then there are a number of secondary answers, and they’re normally around the argument that in a region where a lot of things are going terribly wrong; remember, this is 100 kilometers from Syria. We are in Europe, but we’re at the very far east of Europe; and way into the Eastern Mediterranean, in a neighborhood where most things are on the downward spiral.

The international circumstance has almost paradoxically come up with a benign situation for Cyprus because all relevant players in the neighborhood actively want to contribute to a solution. Basically speaking, the great Powers have, in their perspective, bigger fish to fry, and would rather see this issue off the table, and hence I’m one of those envoys of the
Secretary-General that has a united Security Council behind me. That’s no small feat, and that’s something I also impress on my Cypriot friends, that this is a value that we want to use when we have it. And we also have very constructive openings from the guarantor powers that they’re ready to discuss, when time has come, to agree on what their role will be, or rather, what it will not be – depending on whom you ask – in the future settlement.

**UN News Centre: Is there still an important role for the UN to play here?**

**Espen Barth Eide:** Absolutely.

**UN News Centre: What would happen if the UN simply withdrew?**

**Espen Barth Eide:** Well, of course this is a question that we should ask the Cypriots, and I do ask the Cypriots, and we consistently get the message that they want us; they need us to be the facilitator. They don’t need us to run the show, and I’m extremely adamant to communicate and behave as somebody who is there to assist the leaders in their process. But the UN controls the buffer zone; we have meetings in the buffer zone. We facilitate, not only the meetings between the leaders and the negotiating teams, but a vast array of 16 working groups, five technical committees, and all possible issues. So basically almost all the formal communication between the North and South happens through the UN.

Not only in the search for a settlement, but also on the daily basis. For instance, the only police cooperation that exists between the two sides goes via the United Nations, so you can imagine what would happen on a small and de-facto, heavily integrated island, if there was no contact on this issue. So both in the current and in the future, I think the UN has a role.

**UN News Centre: The Cypriot President told the General Assembly at the UN recently that he thought the deal could be done by the end of the year. Is that realistic?**

**Espen Barth Eide:** Absolutely, it’s ambitious but feasible. And what I mean by that is: ambitious as a sportsman ready to win the race. He can win; he just has to put his efforts or her efforts into winning, and it’s the same thing here. The main issue is a sustained will and that we manage to use the next months in order to orchestrate the sequence of things, so that that goal can be held. I have to underline that what Anastasiades said in that speech here – which was a very a good speech in my view – echoes what his counterpart, Mr. Akýncý says.

They have actually repeatedly and jointly said that their aim is to achieve a settlement by the end of 2016. The first time they said that, was in Davos this year. At that time there was 11-and-a-half months to go, as that was in the middle of January; they said that again on the 15th of May, which was one year anniversary of their meeting; they said it again a week before we went to New York, in a joint statement, and now they have said it individually. So this is clearly a shared commitment.

I think, to be as transparent as possible, we don’t know that it will work. It is an ambitious goal. It’s possible, but it will only work if we have this leader-led dedication toward the end.

**UN News Centre: Is there any more constructive pressure that the UN can apply; and that you can apply in your role?**

**Espen Barth Eide:** We should be constructive but we should not use pressure, because the pressure itself can create the sense that somebody else wants to define the terms. We tried that in Cyprus and it did not work particularly well with the Annan plan in 2004, and we tried it in other places. But constructive, yes, so we are now looking for ways, and this was very much the essence of the Secretary-General’s own message of the leaders yesterday.

In the meeting – which was a long, substantive meeting on Sunday, the 25th of September – he said that he personally, and the whole UN system, including myself; all of us are fully dedicated to doing whatever we can to coordinate between them, but also with other players, and to look for the physical and the mental space, and to provide that so that the most difficult issues can be solved. Because the challenge we have now – I said a vast array of issues are done, even very difficult ones – we’re moving into the most difficult phase but these issues are connected. So you cannot do an issue one day and then three weeks later do another one, because these issues need a simultaneous accommodation, and that’s the space we are looking for now.
UN News Centre: So these issues need to be sequenced very carefully and choreographed, and will the UN be playing a role in that?

Espen Barth Eide: Very much so, but always under the guidance of the Cypriots because, and I repeat that, because it is very important that they know we are there to help them. We – the Secretary-General, the Security Council, the European Union, the whole world basically – would warmly welcome a positive breakthrough along the lines that the leaders are seeking, but I would also say a settlement in Cyprus will be a source of inspiration for the neighbourhood and for the world.

Our Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, has said repeatedly that he sees Colombia and Cyprus as two of the very few opportunities to see that age-old conflicts are overcome. Interestingly at the end of the meeting on the 25th of September, the Secretary-General flew to Cartagena to be present at the signing of the Colombia peace accord, and obviously he would like to see he could do something similar in the near future also in Cyprus.

UN News Centre: Is there a real danger that the last 50 years could be for nothing and that we could face going back to the status quo, as it was in 1974 – a position of conflict between the two communities?

Espen Barth Eide: On the first part of that question, I would say yes, there is definitely a risk that we lose what we now have achieved because we have, in a sense, arrived at a plateau, from which you can either go to a solution or a downward spiral. I wouldn’t say conflict as in the violent, physical conflict, but I think it is clear for all of us – and that is not only me saying it, but it is also well known to other people who are dealing with it on both sides – that the alternative is not any longer just the status quo; it’s not just a stable, safe status quo that will continue forever, in the sense that, the Cypriots have been living in a state of exception.

They have quite correctly stated – both the North and the South – that the current situation is unacceptable and must be overcome, and I would be very worried if people think that they can just cool down this and there will be a new chance in five or ten years. This is in no way to suggest that I know what the future will look like, but my sense and my own experience with international relations, suggest that losing this opportunity is not good for you; neither for Cypriots nor for somebody trying to be helpful in the neighbourhood. So the region needs this and it is so close that to miss this opportunity would be a historic failure.

UN News Centre: Can you just highlight what the outstanding issues are; they are the most intractable or difficult issues to solve, aren’t they?

Espen Barth Eide: The two big ones are the future security set up and the role of the guarantor: what will happen to the guarantor? Will the Treaty of Guarantee and Alliance be continued or cancelled, or altered? This is a question that can only be dealt with at the end, and the two leaders want to do it in the end. But it is still outstanding, of course, but we have done a lot of work over the last year but also this week, here in the General Assembly, to prepare for that with the guarantor powers as well. Then we have the issue of territorial readjustment. There is an assumption that that will happen, I think both parties are aware that some of that might happen, but the extent to which, and the modalities in which they will happen: it’s to do with the buffer-zone, the non-inhabited areas, but we also talk about inhabited areas, and as you can imagine, this issue has a strong emotional dimension because it deals with people.

However, the Secretary-General pointed out that in another part of the negotiations, there is now a full and complete agreement that human right standards and European Acquis Communautaire – the agreed to values and principles of the European Union and the Council of Europe standards – will be applied across the island. This means that the importance of where you live is actually less than it used to be in the previous negotiations and in the Annan plan, because your individual rights are independent of each constituent state or which community you belong to.

So that should soften that discussion somewhat, but it is still complicated. And then we have some few outstanding issues in those chapters that are largely done. We have an issue in the property chapter, about how to deal with reinstatement versus compensation for lost property. It circles around the concept of emotional link – which is probably too complicated to describe in detail, but that’s the one issue. We have a few outstanding governance issues, including on quotas in government and the issue of whether we will have a rotating presidency or not. But those are basically the issues that we still have to solve at the strategic level. And below the strategic level, there are many issues but, thankfully, not controversial, they just need to be done.
Creating a federation is, of course, political but it is also practical; and you need to change what you agreed into the constitution; you need constitutional laws; you need to set up the federal police service; you need to make sure that the Euro is the currency on both sides or in the whole country- and everybody agrees to this. The controversy is [long over] but there’s still outstanding work and we have almost a hundred things like this that we have to do but that’s also part of what my team is helping them to prepare.