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Mali continues to make progress, but swift action needed as civilians still face threats – UN envoy

5 October – While recent crises threatening the peace process in Mali had been overcome and new agreements reached, progress must be accelerated as the situation remains perilous for peacekeepers and civilians, the head of United Nations peacekeeping efforts in the West African country told the Security Council today.

“Despite the positive developments, we must remember that the agreed deadlines of 2018 are quickly approaching and the challenges are enormous,” said Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Mali and Head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) said via videoconference from the Malian capital, Bamako.

“All parties must redouble their efforts to re-establish trust between them and, despite the prolonged delays in the implementation of the Agreement [on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali], engage in necessary reforms and provide a peace dividend to the people,” he added.

He said that the period under the Council’s review, mid-June to mid-September, witnessed debate over a draft revision of the national Constitution amid armed clashes between the Platform and Coordination, the two coalitions that had signed onto the 2015 peace agreement. The combined efforts of the signatory movements and the international community had allowed
MINUSMA to overcome the crises, but delays in implementing the agreement persisted.

Following the clashes, he said, truces were agreed upon in August, with further commitments to end hostilities having been signed in September. Earlier in the day, several prisoners held by the groups had been freed and recent progress included the participation in a 20 September high-level meeting in New York of both coalition leaders, who had agreed to accelerate the peace agreement’s implementation.

Some of the specifics they had discussed included establishing a second chamber of Parliament, operationalizing territorial collectives, launching demobilization activities, security sector reform and redeploying the reformed national military.

“Yet, the challenges remain enormous,” he stressed. The Human rights situation remains a source of deep concern, particularly given the rise of armed extremism, the absence of State authority in certain areas and the imposition of anti-terrorism measures. While progress in fighting impunity for abuses that occurred during the 2012 crisis included the conviction of Aliou Mahamane Touré, there must be justice for all and every perpetrator must held accountable, he said.

He added that the recently authorized sanctions regime was an important part of the pursuit of justice and peace. Initiatives such as the dissemination of information on human rights and the establishment of the international commission of inquiry would also help fight impunity, he said, adding that MINUSMA continued to support State institutions in all areas through regular dialogue.

The security situation remained a major obstacle, he said, with nearly daily losses of UN peacekeepers due to anti-personnel mines and improvised explosives. Accelerated reconciliation efforts were needed as was the full deployment of the escort battalion for the regional reaction force. Given all the challenges, he reiterated the need for funding to invest in protection, improve monitoring, enhanced patrolling and detection, and early warning systems to reduce the toll of attacks.

**Asylum and refugee protection represent ‘humanity at its best,’ says senior UN official**

5 October — Warning of threats to the global asylum environment, the United Nations refugee agency’s protection chief today stressed the importance of sustained engagement by the international community to keep refugees high on the political agenda.

“The interest in refugee and displacement-related issues tends to wax and wane. We are already seeing a different dynamic today than in 2015, when refugees were foremost on the political agenda,” Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Volker Türk said in a key address to the annual Executive Committee meeting of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva.

“Sustained engagement is required, especially to address protracted refugee and internal displacement situations, but also new large movements of refugees and migrants,” he added, stressing that every nation must exercise its responsibility towards all people – nationals and non-nationals alike – who are subject to the jurisdiction of a country.

“Providing protection and hope for the future does not take anything away; if properly managed, it adds and enriches,” Mr. Türk explained, adding: “Sometimes this gets forgotten in the media chatter and myopic political discourse where abstract concepts and ideologies obscure the realities of human beings in distress.”

He added that: “Asylum and refugee protection are not things thrown easily to the wind. They represent humanity at its best, and respect for each human being.”
In this regard, next year’s Global Compact on Refugees will help to sustain this much-needed interest, he said, referring to an internationally agreed document on the refugee issues to be adopted by UN Member States in 2018.

He said the proposed compact would broaden support base by building new and reinforcing old partnerships, such as with the World Bank, regional bodies, civil society, and the private sector, and encourage much stronger commitments to resettlement and complementary pathways.

The compact would also enable greater predictability and investment in the future by strengthening the resilience of both refugees and hosting communities.

“This is a tall order, but it is achievable if we work on it together,” he told representatives of 151 States that make up the Executive Committee.

On international protection, Mr. Türk said violations of international refugee law are “wide-ranging and occur in all parts of the world.”

“In particular, they have included killings of refugees by the military,” he said, adding that there has also been a surge in serious incidents of refoulement, the forced return of refugees.

Another major worry is an increasing trend in deterrence measures by governments. Prolonged, arbitrary, and indefinite detention of asylum-seekers and refugees continues in a number of countries, including in so-called ‘regional processing centres,’ he said.

“Granting asylum and protecting refugees is a humanitarian, non-political act,” he said, stressing that some politicians have cast aside humanity in favour of short-term political gains, arguing that they were acting in defence of the liberty, security, and safety of their citizenry.

“This is dangerous – not just for the many refugees whose lives are affected as a result, but also for the citizens in whose defence governments purport to act,” he said.

A variety of terms are used to describe refugees, such as “undocumented people” or “vulnerable migrants,” possibly with the idea of making a stronger case for the rights of all people on the move. However, this has caused confusion and inadvertently provided fodder for those who wish to undermine refugees’ rights.

“I have to say that, quite apart from the erroneous legal depiction, I find it inappropriate to present people as a sub-set of anything, migrants or otherwise,” he said.

“A refugee is a refugee,” he continued, explaining that there is a clear legal definition of refugees linked to absence of national protection. The essence of international protection lies in identifying and recognizing the needs of people fleeing conflict, violence, human rights abuses, and other serious predicaments in their country of origin, Mr. Türk added.
Security Council authorizes UN Mission to verify truce between Colombian Government and ELN

5 October – Acting unanimously, the United Nations Security Council today expanded the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, tasking it to monitor temporary bilateral ceasefire between the Colombian Government and the National Liberation Army (ELN) armed group.

The Council, through a new resolution, decided that the UN Verification Mission will, on a temporary basis until 9 January 2018, “verify compliance with the temporary, bilateral, national ceasefire with the ELN at the national, regional and local level.”

“It shall also] endeavour to prevent incidents through enhanced coordination between the parties and resolution of disagreements” noted the resolution.

In today’s resolution, the Security Council also tasked the Verification Mission with enabling a timely response by the parties to incidents, as well as verifying and reporting publicly and to the parties on compliance with the ceasefire.

The Council also approved an addition of no more than 70 international observers, as requested by the Secretary-General for liaising with the Colombian Armed Forces and ELN to avoid conflicting movements and prevent armed clashes.

The resolution follows an agreement reached in early September in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, between the Colombian Government and the ELN on a bilateral and temporary ceasefire. The ceasefire entered into force on 1 October, and is due to remain in force until the second week of January 2018.

Also today, the Council adopted a presidential statement in which it recognized the work of the (now closed) UN Mission in Colombia and welcomed the “remarkable achievements” in the country following the 2016 Final Agreement between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP).

Empower teachers; give them the freedom to teach, UN urges on World Day

5 October – Underscoring the critical important role teachers play in ensuring the future for every society, the United Nations today called for empowering educators with the freedom and support they need to undertake their vital mission.

“Being an empowered teacher means having access to high-quality training, fair wages, and continuous opportunities for professional development,” the heads of key UN agencies and programmes said today in a joint message on World Teachers’ Day.

Empowerment also means teachers having the freedom to support the development of national curricula, the professional autonomy to choose teaching methods and approaches and being able to teach in safety and security during times of political change, instability and conflict, they added.
The joint message was issued by Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); Guy Ryder, the Director-General of International Labour Organization (ILO); Anthony Lake, the Executive-Director of UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF); Achim Steiner, the Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP); and Fred van Leeuwen, the General-Secretary of Education International (a global federation representing organizations of teachers and other education employees).

It emphasized that academic freedom – while important for teachers at all levels of education – is especially critical for higher-education to support the educators’ ability to innovate, explore, and stay up-to-date on the latest pedagogical research.

“This World Teachers’ Day, join us in empowering teachers to teach in freedom so that, in turn, every child and every adult is free to learn – to the benefit of a better world,” they urged.

The importance of building a skilled, valued and empowered education workforce has also been underscored in the 2030 Agenda’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Target 4C of Goal 4, in particular, calls for “substantially increasing” the supply of qualified teachers by 2030, and in that context, underlines importance of international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.

Marked annually on 5 October since 1994, World Teachers’ Day commemorates the anniversary of the signing of the 1966 UNESCO/ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers – the primary reference framework that addresses teachers’ rights and responsibilities at the global scale.

The theme for this year’s commemoration is Teaching in Freedom, Empowering Teachers.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, which complements the 1966 UNESCO/ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, stressing the importance of teacher autonomy and academic freedom in building a world in which education and learning are truly universal.

UN peacekeeping chief seeks Security Council support for speedy deployment of uniformed personnel

5 October – The United Nations peacekeeping chief today said rapid deployment of uniformed personnel to the field is a costly, complex and difficult process that requires the commitment of the contributors, the host country and neighbors, as well as the support of the Security Council.

“Generating uniformed personnel for UN peacekeeping is a tireless and enormous task,” said Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations, in a briefing, noting that this is the first time the Council has dedicated a meeting to this issue – strategic force generation.

A small team of dedicated officers is in charge of generating and rotating more than 300 units – including 76 infantry battalions – with tens of thousands of troops and police from over 120 countries, while selecting and deploying several thousand individual staff and police officers throughout the year, Mr. Lacroix explained.

In the weeks and months that pass from the issuance of a mandate by the Security Council, until a mission reaches a minimum operating capacity, lives can be lost. There are financial implications of long deployment timelines as well, as a
A peacekeeping operation deployed too late will have a more intractable situation to address, potentially requiring a larger footprint and prolonging the life of that mission, he stated.

The peacekeeping chief noted significant progress made towards more rapid deployment. For example, a battalion in the UN mission in the Central African Republic that was facing conduct and discipline issues has been replaced in less than 60 days.

He also said that his office recently received sufficient pledges to fulfil nearly all the requirements for a Vanguard Brigade of roughly 4,000 troops and police for the remainder of 2017 and the first half of next year.

Despite the success of the last two years, a number of specialized capabilities remain in short supply, particularly high-value enablers, such as helicopters, quick reaction forces, and units trained to dispose of explosive ordnance.

There is also a lack of progress towards targets for deployment of female peacekeepers.

He highlighted a crucial role the Security Council plays in defining and helping meet the capability requirements of UN missions, encouraging Council Members to come forward with new, innovative contributions, including through the provision of tailored and sustained training and capacity building efforts to address mid- to long-term capability gaps. The trilateral partnership between Japan and several African troop-contributing countries is a good example of this kind of initiative, he added.

The Council can also take into account current or potential capability gaps, such as those in the UN Mission in Mali, when drafting or renewing mandates. For missions like that in South Sudan, the Council should engage collectively and individually to ensure that host governments fully comply with status of mission agreements; and that the Council act accordingly when host governments fail to do so, he said.

The Council can also ensure the full implementation of performance, training and conduct requirements, and in cases of underperformance or misconduct, the UN Secretariat relies on the Council’s consistent support to address them.

The Council can also back UN efforts to foster a culture of continuous improvement and adaptation through strategic force generation and other reform efforts.

“Strategic force generation is an important and still relatively new initiative,” he said, stressing that it should be seen as only one part of a broader, ongoing effort by the Secretariat to make peacekeeping operations a more efficient, effective and accountable tool for the international community.

**A year after Hurricane Matthew, Haiti's children still incredibly vulnerable to disasters – UNICEF**

5 October – One year has passed since Hurricane Matthew made landfall in southwest Haiti – leaving terrible destruction in its wake – but children and adolescents on the island still remain highly vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters and extreme weather events, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has warned.

“Hundreds of thousands of children had their lives turned upside down by Hurricane Matthew,” said Marc Vincent, the head of the UNICEF country office in Haiti, in a news release issued by the agency.

“The courage and determination of families to recover and begin to rebuild their lives is admirable and [we are] is proud to be one of the organizations continuing to support them.”

At the St. Antoine Hospital in Jérémie, Haiti, two of the three main buildings were devastated by Hurricane Matthew in October 2016. Photo: UNFPA/Eddie Wright
In the immediate aftermath of the storm, UN mobilized its staff on the ground to respond to the most urgent needs, sending emergency aid for affected children and families, including clean water and sanitation.

Working together with the Haitian Government and partner organizations, over the past 12 months, the UNICEF rehabilitated 120 schools damaged by the hurricane, enabling the return of more than 30,000 children to school. It also provided school furniture to some 139 schools and provided another 26,000 children with psycho-social support.

In the Sud and Grand'Anse departments – two of the worst hit parts of the island – UNICEF helped screen 160,000 children for malnutrition in an ongoing programme, and organized a series of consultations with adolescents to enable them to express their concerns and ideas about risk and disaster management, with the results shared with local authorities.

Recalling the destruction and feeling of despair, Bernard, a fourteen-year-old child from Roche-à-Bateau (in southern Haiti) said: “After [Hurricane] Matthew passed, I thought it would be virtually impossible to continue living. All the trees were uprooted."

“But people are beginning gradually to recover,” he added.

Hurricane Matthew (Category 4) made landfall in Haiti on 4 October 2016. At the time, the “very powerful and slow moving” storm was described as the worst storm the country had seen in decades. As it passed over the country, the storm claimed hundreds of lives and destroyed critical infrastructure, including key bridges, communication links, and water and sanitation systems.

Source: UNICEF [see in full screen]

Vegetable oils lift food prices in September; cereal prices down on bumper crop prospects

5 October – Global food prices rose slightly in September, as firmer prices of vegetable oils and dairy products offset declining prices for staple cereal grains, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said today.

A news release said that the FAO Food Price Index – tracking the monthly change in international market prices for five key commodity groups – averaged 178.4 points for the month of September, up 0.8 per cent from August and marking a 4.3 per cent increase from a year earlier.

Vegetable oil prices increased by 4.6 per cent, driven primarily by palm oil, although values for soy, rapeseed and sunflower oils also rose.

Dairy prices rose by 2.1 per cent from August, driven by butter and cheese prices at a time of supply constraints in Australia, New Zealand and the European Union. Meat prices were broadly unchanged.

Cereal prices declined by 1.0 per cent, as maize and wheat quotations fell in step with strong supply and harvest prospects. FAO expects the current growing season to yield record worldwide cereals output.

Sugar prices was unchanged for the month, but it was about 33 per cent below its year-ago level - a decline due to oversupply in world markets and a slowdown in demand.
Cereal inventories head for a new high

FAO updated its global cereal production forecast for 2017, raised to 2,612 million tonnes, or almost 7 million tonnes above the record set in 2016, according to the Cereal Supply and Demand Brief, also released today.

September's forecasts were raised on account of robust wheat production trends in Europe and Russia and expected maize outputs in China and the United States.

FAO now forecasts 750.1 million tonnes of wheat to be harvested in 2017 and 1,361 million tonnes of coarse grains, as well as 500.7 million tonnes of rice.

UN report reveals shocking levels of grave violations against children affected by conflicts

5 October – More than 15,500 children became victims of widespread violations – including shocking levels of killing and maiming, recruitment and use, and denial of humanitarian access – a new United Nations report has revealed.

According to the Secretary-General’s report on children and armed conflict, presented today to the Security Council, children from countries such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, suffered an unacceptable level of violations by parties to conflict – both government forces as well as non-State armed groups.

“The tragic fate of child victims of conflict cannot and must not leave us unmoved; a child killed, recruited as a soldier, injured in an attack or prevented from going school due to a conflict is already one too many,” the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, said in a news release today.

Of the 20 country situations included in the report, at least 4,000 verified violations committed by Government forces and over 11,500 by non-State armed groups. Afghanistan recorded the highest number of verified child casualties since the UN started documenting civilian casualties in 2009, with 3,512 children killed or maimed last year – an increase of 24 per cent compared to the previous year.

The report also documents 851 verified cases (more than double the number in 2015) of children recruited and used in Syria, and 1,915 in Somalia in 2016. It also notes that in Yemen, at least 1,340 children were killed or maimed. In Syria that number stood at 1,299.

UN chief ‘appalled’ at scale of violations

Expressing shock over the scale of violations documented in the report, UN Secretary-General António Guterres reiterated his call on parties to conflict to abide by their responsibility to protect children, in accordance with their obligation under international humanitarian and human rights law.

“The goal of the report is not only to raise awareness of the violations of the rights of children but also to promote measures that can diminish the tragic plight of children in conflict,” read a statement attributable to the spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

“The Secretary-General is encouraged that several governments and non-state actors are now working with the United
Nations towards that objective. He hopes that more will follow,” it added.

The statement further noted that the new Developments and Concerns section included in the report reflects this enhanced UN engagement, which should lead to reducing the suffering of children victims of armed conflict and increase their protection.

The violations covered in the report include recruitment or use of children; killing or maiming children; committing rape and other forms of sexual violence against children; engaging in attacks on schools and/or hospitals; and abducting children in situations of armed conflict.

The parties which committed these violations are listed in annexes to the report. The annexes also include parties that have put in place measures to improve protection of children during the reporting period and those who have not implemented adequate measures.

**Partnerships will play key role in future of work in Europe and Central Asia - UN labour agency**

5 October – The United Nations International Labour Organization’s 10th European Regional Meeting concluded today with a call for a future of work where partnerships play a key role in promoting dialogue, social progress and economic growth in the region.

Addressing the closing session of the Regional Meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, ILO Director-General Guy Ryder said that while there is a considerable amount of uncertainty as to the direction the world of work is heading in, determination and ambition must replace optimism and pessimism.

“We all have to come together with a feeling of determination and ambition,” he said, stressing that ambition means not accepting, not being passive spectators to processes of change, but instead having the determination to be the architects of change, “so that the future of work can be shaped according to what we want.”

The three-day gathering focused on the dynamic processes shaping the future of work in the region, which include rapid technological advances, globalization, demographic trends, large movements of refugees and migrants, as well as environmental challenges.

The so-named ‘Istanbul Initiative’ presents a policy framework to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks relating to the future of work in the region. It also calls on the ILO to provide tripartite constituents in member States with the advice and support they need to design these policies.

“The ILO has not been a passive spectator to change over the past century. It has been a historic architect of change and we have done a lot to make sure that that change has bent in the direction of social justice. That is what we must continue to do,” he concluded.

The ILO European Regional Meeting takes place every four years. It brings together government, employer and worker representatives from 51 European and Central Asian countries. The theme of this year’s meeting was What future for decent work in Europe and Central Asia: Opportunities and challenges.
Security Council re-authorizes operations to disrupt migrant smuggling off coast of Libya

5 October – The Security Council today extended by one year the authorization for Member States to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to suspect are being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking.

Unanimously adopting a resolution, the 15-member body condemned all acts of migrant smuggling and human trafficking into, through and from the Libyan territory and off the coast of Libya, which further undermine the process of stabilization of Libya and endanger the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

The Council underscored that the resolution is intended to disrupt the organized criminal enterprises, but not to undermine the human rights of individuals or prevent them from seeking protection under international human rights law and international refugee law.

The Council reiterated its calls on Member States, acting nationally or through regional organizations, to cooperate with the Government of National Accord and with each other to assist Libya, upon request, in building needed capacity to secure its borders and prevent, investigate and prosecute acts of smuggling of migrants and human trafficking through its territory and in its territorial sea.

Tens of thousands of desperate people are attempting to cross the Mediterranean and reach Europe in dangerous boats like these in Libya. Photo: UNHCR/F. Noy