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Wrapping up African trip, UN deputy chief vows to ensure displaced women return home in dignity

27 July – The United Nations deputy chief wrapped up her visit to two African countries – Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – where today she stressed the importance of women's participation in peace, security and development processes.

The final day's itinerary for Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed included a visit to the Mugunga camp for internally displaced persons, on the outskirts of Goma, which is the capital of North Kivu Province in restive eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Ms. Mohammed said that she is firmly resolved to ensure that women in the camp return home in “dignity and humanity, which is “not a favour but a right,” promising to embark on an advocacy initiative to finance the better settlement of the women as they return to their places of origin.

She also commended the women at the camp for their involvement in small trade through micro-financing, which enabled them to meet the needs of their families.

Regarding the victims of sexual violence, she said: “These are our African women [and] we will take their voice out” to the international community and see what can be done to put an end to the scourge.
In the DRC, the Deputy Secretary-General also visited the women's economic and empowerment centre and stressed that the mission was intended to “revitalize women's participation and leadership in peace, security and development.”

The mission was also intended to seek the support of the governor in the work of women in the provinces and to advocate for the implementation of legal texts in favour of gender equality, she said.

Ms. Mohammed began the trip on 18 July, which first took her to Nigeria. She was joined by the UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, as well as the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, and the African Union Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop.

This first-ever high-level joint AU-UN high-level trip is the first part of a two-part mission focused on women's meaningful participation in peace, security and development. A similar mission will cover two further countries later in the year.

**Ahead of World Day, UN agency says fight against hepatitis 'gaining momentum'**

27 July – On the eve of World Hepatitis Day, the United Nations health agency released a study that reveals efforts to eliminate disease are gaining momentum globally.

“It is encouraging to see countries turning commitment into action to tackle hepatitis,” said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO).

“Identifying interventions that have a high impact is a key step towards eliminating this devastating disease,” he added, noting that many countries have succeeded in scaling-up the hepatitis B vaccination and now the task is to increase access to diagnosis and treatment.

New WHO data from 28 countries representing some 70 per cent of the global hepatitis burden reveals that nearly all have established high-level national hepatitis elimination committees and more than half have allocated dedicated funding for hepatitis responses.

Findings also show that more than 86 per cent of the countries reviewed have set national hepatitis elimination targets and more than 70 per cent have begun to develop national hepatitis plans to enable access to effective prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care services. Furthermore, nearly half of the countries surveyed are aiming for elimination through providing universal access to hepatitis treatment.

But WHO is still concerned that progress needs to speed up. “The national response towards hepatitis elimination is gaining momentum. However, at best one in 10 people who are living with hepatitis know they are infected and can access treatment. This is unacceptable,” said Gottfried Hirnschall, WHO's Director of the HIV Department and Global Hepatitis Programme.

This week, WHO also added a new generic treatment to its list of WHO-prequalified hepatitis C medicines to increase access to therapy, and is promoting prevention through injection safety: a key factor in reducing hepatitis B and C transmission.

This year's World Hepatitis Day is being marked under the theme 'Eliminate Hepatitis' to mobilize intensified action towards the health targets in the 2030 Agenda and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“For hepatitis elimination to become a reality, countries need to accelerate their efforts and increase investments in life-

A health worker displays a vaccine against Hib, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and hepatitis B at a storage facility in the south-western city of Khulna, Bangladesh. Photo: UNICEF/Shehab Uddin
saving care. There is simply no reason why many millions of people still have not been tested for hepatitis and cannot access the treatment for which they are in dire need,” said Mr. Hirnschall.

Viral hepatitis affected 325 million people worldwide in 2015, with 257 million people living with hepatitis B and 71 million people living with hepatitis C – the two main killers of the five types of hepatitis. Viral hepatitis caused 1.34 million deaths in 2015, a figure close to the number of tuberculosis deaths and exceeding deaths linked to HIV.

In early November, WHO and its partners will convene World Hepatitis Summit 2017 in São Paulo, Brazil, which promises to be the largest global event to advance the viral hepatitis agenda, bringing together key players.

**UN chief welcomes news crisis in Jerusalem's Old City has been 'defused'**

**27 July** – After days of mounting tensions over the situation around Jerusalem's holy sites, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today welcomed news that the crisis in the Old City has been defused.

In a statement issued by a UN spokesman, the Secretary-General welcomed the news that the crisis has been defused “in line with the status quo at the holy sites before 14 July.”

The statement comes in the wake of a series of clashes and rising tensions in and around Jerusalem's Old City since mid-June, particularly near the holy site known as the Temple Mount and as Haram al-Sharif, where a deadly stabbing of two Israeli police officers occurred on 14 July.

News reports today suggest that metal detectors and other security measures around the holy sites have been removed or eased. According to media reports, the 1967 status quo is an accord between Israel and Jordan, which allows the Islamic Trust or Waqf to manage the holy site.

“[The Secretary-General] hopes that the dialogue will continue and contribute to creating an atmosphere of trust amongst the communities,” said the statement, adding, that the UN chief will remain engaged with all stakeholders to this effect.
'Sustainable, inclusive societies,' priority for new President of UN economic and social body

27 July – A week after the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) assessed the progress on implementing the 2030 Agenda, the newly elected President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has stressed her priority to push forward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“I wish to announce that the key priority of my Presidency will be to develop initiatives towards fostering sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all,” said Marie Chatardová, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the UN, after her election by acclamation earlier today.

Delivering her first remarks as President, Ms. Chatardova welcomed the enormous interest among Member States to participate in the Voluntary National Reviews. “It proves that we take our shared vision of a better world seriously,” she said.

Noting several positive developments towards reaching the 2030 targets, such as unprecedented technological advancement and innovation, she said that nevertheless, the world continued to experience rising inequalities in most countries.

“If multilateralism is to stay relevant in this evolving context, we need to take these challenges seriously, and work on devising solutions to address them. I believe that the ECOSOC system has a key role to play,” she asserted.

To explore further collective action on the issue, the new President announced her intention to convene an ECOSOC Special Meeting at UN Headquarters in May 2018.

“We must work together and make all efforts to achieve what we have set out: ‘to leave no-one behind.’ Truly no one!” she underscored.

ECOSOC now seen as multi-stakeholder forum for tackling complex issues

Outgoing ECOSOC President Frederick Musiwa Makamure Shava took stock of activities under his tenure.

On the priority of eradicating poverty, he said “we explored various means for promoting sustainable development; expanding opportunities; and addressing related challenges to leave no one behind,” he recalled.

“It was a tall order, but we made good progress,” he affirmed.

Inspired by what the delegation of Norway said during the HLPF: “No one can do everything, but we can all do something,” Mr. Shava urged the respective Ministries, organizations and communities to use this as their mantra in implementing the SDGs.

Asserting that “the moment is ripe” to further strengthen ECOSOC to support the 2030 Agenda, the outgoing president emphasized the importance of aligning the agendas of the General Assembly, ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies.

According to Mr. Shava, one of the biggest take-aways from the Council's 2017 substantive session was “the importance of ECOSOC as a multi-stakeholder platform for forging solutions to complex and emerging issues,” observing that it is uniquely positioned at the global level to support efforts to leave no one behind.
The success of ECOSOC should be measured not by the number of resolutions that it adopts, but by the impact that it has on the lives of real people. ECOSOC is where Member States coordinate and guide the UN development system, and can therefore make a real impact on citizens around the world,” concluded the outgoing President.

Wu Hongbo, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said inequalities among and within countries are deep and addressing them is important for achieving sustainable development and peace. International support for sustainable and resilient societies is based on the recognition that “we cannot overcome global challenges in isolation.”

Solidarity, shared responsibility and open dialogue are more important than ever, he continued. The 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction together had formed an action plan for global prosperity and partnership.

The Council and its various forums had a key role in nurturing that vital opportunity by supporting implementation through the sharing of integrated and holistic approaches, he stated.

'None of us should stand silent' while civilians suffer in Syria, Security Council told

27 July – Despite the remarkable hope and strength shown by most Syrians, daily life remains dangerous for millions of people across the country, a senior United Nations aid official warned today, calling for the parties to the six year conflict to stop targeting of civilians, to allow humanitarian access, and to end the “horrific” practice of besiegement.

Briefing the UN Security Council via videoconference from Amman, Jordan, Deputy UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Ursula Mueller said that earlier in the day, she had visited the Azraq refugee camp, where around 35,000 refugees lived, many of whom had been there for several years. Most were women and children, she added.

“I was inspired by the incredible hope and strength of those who I met despite the terrible circumstances that have been forced upon them,” she said, delivering remarks on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien.

“Their message to me was clear and I pass it on to you today,” she continued. “What they want more than anything is for the guns to fall silent; the conflict to end; and for them to be able to go home when it is safe to do so.”

She went on to note that the “hope and strength found in Azraq is replicated across Syria. This is remarkable given that daily life remains dangerous and desperate for millions of people inside the country.”

Pointing to a reduction of violence in some areas since a 4 May memorandum on de-escalation, she said the humanitarian and protection situation remains extremely difficult for civilians in many parts of the country.

Indeed, Ms. Mueller spotlighted continued fighting and the situations in besieged areas of Damascus and the Syrian-Jordanian border as well as anti-ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Da’esh) operations in Raqqa governorate. Infighting among non-State armed groups and designated terrorist groups, mentioning the north-western part of the country, was also a concern.

'Not much positive news to report' on humanitarian access

Turning to humanitarian access for besieged and hard-to-reach areas, she lamented that “there is not much positive news to
report,” listing obstacles to convoys that included lack of approvals; lack of facilitation letters by the Syrian Government; other administrative delays; as well as insecurity and fighting.

“At the same time, arbitrary restrictions by some non-State armed groups, listed terrorist groups, and self-designated local authorities also continue to obstruct access in various ways, especially in Idleb and the eastern governorates of Syria. This means that, despite reductions in violence, we have not been able to noticeably increase our reach,” she explained.

Despite security and access challenges to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, Ms. Mueller underscored that in Syria, the UN continues to implement one of the largest humanitarian operations in the world, saying “humanitarians continue to reach millions on a monthly basis.”

As of May, humanitarians have collectively reached 8.5 million people in a single month, including 4.4 million women and girls, and 4.1 million men and boys with multi-sector assistance.

“The conflict in Syria may be complex, but ensuring people are protected and supported is our imperative as humanitarians, and as human beings. None of us should stand silent while civilians suffer and while fear tactics and the denial of food, water, medical supplies, and other forms of aid are used as methods of war,” stressed Ms. Mueller.

**Migrant workers in south-east Asia lack access to fair, responsive legal remedies – UN report**

27 July – Access to justice is often out of reach for migrant workers in South-east Asia, the United Nations labour agency reported today in a study that shows non-governmental organizations assisting more often than Government officials or trade unions.

“Barriers to accessing formal assistance are one of the key reasons why migrant workers are vulnerable to labour rights violations during recruitment and employment,” said Tomoko Nishimoto, UN International Labour Organization's (ILO) Assistant Director-General and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, in the forward to the report Access to justice for migrant workers in South-east Asia.

The report found that while the estimated 20.2 million migrant workers originating from South-east Asia have equal access to labour rights and social protections in the countries in which they work, “they frequently experience unequal and discriminatory treatment in practice.”

Lack of written evidence, high cost of legal assistance, fear of retaliation and language barriers are among the challenges to accessing justice noted in the report.

The authors argue that there is a substantial and largely unmet demand for fair and responsive remedies in the countries surveyed.

The study is based on complaint case data gathered by Migrant Worker Resource Centres (MRCs) from 2011 to 2015. Detailed information on over 1,000 cases involving more than 7,000 women and men migrant workers was documented in Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, establishing the largest regional dataset of migrant complaints compiled within South-East Asia.

“Migrant workers' vulnerability to exploitation is exacerbated by the absence of fair, efficient and accessible means to resolve grievances when they occur, said says Ben Harkins, ILO Technical Officer and lead author of the report.
Most migrant workers who are faced with situations of exploitation and abuse seek practical resolutions, such as disbursement of unpaid wages, deployment to destination countries and return of identification documents, ILO reported.

“It is clear that these demands are not adequately met through enforcement of labour and human trafficking laws currently and that greater efforts are needed to ensure that migrant workers are provided with just remedies,” said Mr. Harkins.

Its release comes ahead of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, marked annually on 30 July.

**UN expert urges two Koreas to discuss human rights**

27 July – The proposed resumption of dialogue between the two Koreas is an opportunity to discuss and improve the human rights situation in the North, a United Nations expert has said at the end of his second visit to the South.

The Republic of Korea's new President has proposed the resumption of dialogue with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on military and humanitarian issues.

“While I welcome the initiative by the administration of President Moon Jae-in to resume dialogue, it is important that that engagement serves as a platform for North Korea to discuss ways to improve human rights,” said Tomás Ojea Quintana, the Special Rapporteur on human rights in DPRK.

During his five-day mission to Seoul, from 17 to 21 July, the Special Rapporteur met senior Government officials as well as representatives of civil society and other groups. His requests for access to the North have not been granted.

The Special Rapporteur reiterated his deep concern about human rights violations in the North, including allegations of arbitrary detention, human trafficking and enforced disappearances, as well as sexual and gender-based violence against women detained in holding centres in the border areas.

“The information I have been receiving points to different violations that continue to affect the lives of ordinary North Koreans and even foreigners,” he said.

Pyongyang has recently rejected a call by Seoul to resume family reunions, which have not been held for two years, after DPRK resumed nuclear tests and long-range missile launches.

The Special Rapporteur met with a man who wishes to return to DPRK where his wife and son live, despite the risk of being punished for leaving for ROK three years ago.

“If anything, these cases highlight the complexity of the family separation issue that started 70 years ago, and the fact that it continues to take new forms and affect people in the Korean peninsula in profound ways,” he said.

The expert highlighted a surge in the number of Koreans from the North caught in China. They are detained or sent back. Usually harsh labour sentences await them upon their return.

“North Koreans who leave their country are caught in a horrendous cycle of physical and psychological violence, and I received information that some take their own lives when they find out that they are scheduled for repatriation,” said Mr. Ojea Quintana.

The expert noted that China has a responsibility to abide by the principle of non-refoulement in international law. “I appeal to the Government of China to halt the policy, protect those in custody and engage with my mandate and with relevant UN agencies to think of alternatives,” he stressed.
The Special Rapporteur will report his findings and recommendations to the UN General Assembly in October 2017.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

**War crimes fugitive surrenders to UN peacekeepers in DR Congo; UN advocate urges justice for victims**

27 July – The United Nations advocate for ending sexual violence in conflict has welcomed the surrender of fugitive rebel leader Ntabo Ntaberi Sheka to the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), known as MONUSCO.

Mr. Sheka, who the Security Council added to its UN sanctions list after a national warrant was issued for his arrest in 2011, is wanted for crimes related to mass rapes of at least 387 civilians in the eastern DRC during July and August 2010.

He turned himself in yesterday to MONUSCO forces in Mutungo in the North Kivu, after years on the run.

The surrender “signals that the persistent advocacy and engagement of the United Nations and international community, in support of the national authorities, can yield results,” said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten.

Despite the surrender, Under-Secretary-General Patten noted that the militia Mr. Sheka created and leads, the Nduma defense of Congo (NDC), continues to commit violations including rape, killing and forced recruitment.

“Thousands of women and girls, men and boys in eastern Congo continue to be terrorized by those under Cheka's command, with many still fearing the next attack,” Ms. Patten said.

She called for him and his affiliates to stand trial swiftly and in accordance with due process standards, and that anyone supporting the NDC be sanctioned.

The senior UN official also urged that “overdue” reparations be paid to victims.

The fugitive turned himself in to MONUSCO “in full awareness of the fact that he is wanted by the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to stand trial for alleged crimes,” the UN Mission said in a statement.

The mission said that it is committed to supporting the relevant judicial authorities in pursuing criminal prosecutions for all human rights violations, in accordance with the rule of law, and that it has a standing agreement with the DRC government to ensure that all persons in MONUSCO’s care who are handed over to the national authorities are treated in accordance with all relevant human rights standards.
Security Council extends mandate of UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus

27 July – The Security Council today renewed the mandate of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Cyprus for six months, until 31 January 2018, following the recent failure to reach a settlement to the longstanding conflict between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots on the Mediterranean island.

In a resolution adopted unanimously, the 15-member body also requested the Secretary-General to conduct a strategic review of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and report back within four months.

Welcoming the progress made in the peace process since February 2014 and noting the outcome of the recent Conference on Cyprus, the Council encouraged the two sides and all involved participants to sustain their commitment to a settlement under UN auspices.

Despite hopes for a comprehensive settlement, the UN-facilitated conference held from 28 June to 7 July in the Swiss town of Crans-Montana concluded without an agreement. While expressing his disappointment, Secretary-General António Guterres said that initiatives can still be pursued and developed in order to address the outstanding issues.

Further in the resolution, the Council urged the two sides to implement confidence-building measures that can contribute to a conducive environment for a settlement.

UNFICYP was originally set up by the Council in 1964 to prevent further fighting between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots.

Maldives: UN chief expresses concern at erosion of 'basic democratic norms and principles'

27 July – Citing the gradual erosion of basic democratic norms and principles in the country, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today called on the Government “to uphold the constitutionally guaranteed rights of speech and assembly.”

“The Secretary-General urges the Government to refrain from all acts that result in the harassment and intimidation of Members of Parliament, political parties, civil society and the media,” according to a statement issued by a UN spokesman.

Mr. Guterres “encourages effective dialogue and consultations on political issues,” concluded the statement.
UN Security Council urges all Libyans to support calls for national reconciliation

27 July – The United Nations Security Council today welcomed the Joint Declaration issued after a meeting between two Libyan political figures and urged all Libyans to support its calls for a negotiated political solution, national reconciliation, and an immediate ceasefire.

The Joint Declaration was issued after a meeting on 25 July between Fayez Al Sarraj, President of the Presidency Council of Libya, and General Khalifa Haftar, Commander of the LNA, hosted in Paris by President Emmanuel Macron.

In its statement, the 15-member Council praised “recent efforts to strengthen an inclusive political dialogue among all Libyans, supported by Libya's neighbours, international partners and regional organizations.”

The efforts are done within the framework of the Libyan Political Agreement endorsed by UN Security Council resolution 2259 (2015), which endorsed the Rome Communiqué to support the Government of National Accord as the sole legitimate Government of Libya.

The statement also stressed the “importance of the United Nations' central role in facilitating Libyan-led political dialogue,” and Secretary-General António Guterres's “personal involvement” in helping to build stability, security, and national unity in the country.

The Council also welcomed the appointment of Ghassan Salame as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, succeeding Martin Kobler.

Mr. Salame will head the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), which was established in 2011 by the UN Security Council at the request of the Libyan authorities following six months of armed conflict to support the country's new transitional authorities in their post-conflict efforts.