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Annan 'shocked' by Israeli attack on UN Lebanon post that killed at least 2

25 July - Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed shock and deep distress over what he called the “apparently deliberate targeting” by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) of a United Nations observer post in southern Lebanon that has killed two military observers, with two more feared dead.

“I call on the Government of Israel to conduct a full investigation into this very disturbing incident and demand that any further attack on UN positions and personnel must stop,” Mr. Annan after hearing of the attack on the post of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in Rome, where he arrived today for talks on the explosion of violence in the Middle Eastern country.



In his statement, Mr. Annan said that the “coordinated artillery and air attack” occurred despite personal assurances given to him by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that UN positions would be spared fire. The Secretary-General said the post, near the Lebanese town of Khiyam, was “long established and clearly marked.”

In addition, he said the UN Force Commander in south Lebanon, General Alain Pelligrini, had been in repeated contact with Israeli officers throughout the day, stressing the need to protect this particular UN position from attack. At least 14 incidents of firing close to that post have been reported since this afternoon. A UN spokesman added that the firing continued while a search and rescue operation was taking place.

Mr. Annan said that the names and nationalities of the fallen peacekeepers were being withheld pending notification of their families, to whom he extended his condolences.

With UNIFIL positions hit frequently since the current crisis began, four members of the mission's Ghanaian battalion were lightly injured yesterday evening when a tank round from the Israeli side hit inside their position, while this morning, Hezbollah opened small arms fire at one of their convoys, causing some damage but no casualties, according to a press statement.

Hours before the UN military observers were killed, the Security Council discussed the beleaguered mission's future.

The 15-member body met with the countries that contribute troops to UNIFIL before holding consultations that included a briefing by the Director of the Asia and Middle East Division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, as well as discussing Mr. Annan's latest report on the Force, a UN spokesman told reporters.

In his report, released yesterday, Mr. Annan said the upsurge in violence since 12 July had "radically changed the context" in which UNIFIL operates and he recommended its mandate be increased only for another month while all possible options for southern Lebanon are worked out.

Before the recent violence, the Lebanese Government had called for a six-month extension of UNIFIL's mandate, but Mr. Annan wrote that the "circumstances conducive to United Nations peacekeeping do not exist."

UN food agency supplies are distributed in Lebanon; other relief aid held up in Syria

25 July - United Nations food aid is being distributed today in and around the Lebanese capital Beirut to some of the 800,000 or so people forced to flee their homes because of the worsening conflict, but at the same time the UN refugee agency said that relief supplies for over 20,000 displaced are still held up in Syria because of access problems.

Separately, a senior official from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned of a "major food crisis" because the rising insecurity and damage to roads and bridges in Lebanon have not only interrupted the food supply chain but was also likely to disrupt the country's main cereal harvest.

"The first supply of World Food Programme (WFP) food aid – 25 tons of fortified biscuits that had arrived from Italy on Sunday – is now being distributed to those that had been displaced in and around Beirut," UN deputy spokesperson Marie Okabe told reporters in New York.

She said WFP expects to have three convoys this week in Lebanon, transporting both its own food supplies and relief from other organizations, with the first convoy expected to depart tomorrow for Tyre, carrying 125 tons of wheat flour.

Ms. Okabe added that the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) reports that all of its services are functioning to provide health assistance to Palestinian refugees and Lebanese, while it is also providing shelter in schools and camps in southern Lebanon for 4,000 Lebanese.

However, despite these successes, relief supplies from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for more than 20,000 displaced and distressed people in Lebanon were blocked in Syria this morning awaiting the opening of safe passages, the agency said.

"It is enormously frustrating to be right on the back doorstep of Lebanon and ready to move in with hundreds of tons of aid, but the door remains closed," UNHCR spokesperson Jennifer Pagonis told journalists in Geneva.

While relief supplies remained blocked, four members of UNHCR's special emergency team joined a UN convoy and crossed into Lebanon from Syria today, she added. The team is being sent to reinforce staff already on the ground in Beirut and by the end of the week, 25 members of the emergency team are expected to be on the ground and will be split between Lebanon and Syria.

The rising insecurity and damage to roads and bridges caused by the conflict have interrupted the food supply chain in



Lebanon, which relies on food imports for around 90 percent of its cereal needs, the FAO said today, warning also that the population displacement is likely to disrupt the country's main cereal harvest.

"These factors combined provide the recipe for a major food crisis," said Henri Josserand, Chief of FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System.

The UN yesterday launched a \$149 million appeal for Lebanon covering the next three months and focusing on the immediate needs of the affected population for food, health care, logistics, water and sanitation, protection and common services.

Israel used disproportionate force in Gaza, says UN humanitarian chief

25 July - The top United Nations aid official said today that Israel's military offensive in the Gaza Strip is a "disproportionate use of force" but he again emphasized that all sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were guilty of violating humanitarian law.



USG Jan Egeland

Jan Egeland, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, made his comments while on a visit to Gaza as part of his continuing humanitarian mission to the region, from where he will travel to northern Israel tomorrow to see the destruction caused by Hezbollah rockets.

"This was clearly a disproportionate use of force," he said during a visit that included a health clinic damaged by Israeli incursions last week and also a stop at the power station that was destroyed by an air strike on 28 June, leaving the Gaza Strip without 45 per cent of its prior electricity supply.

Mr. Egeland made similar remarks to reporters earlier this month, when he also called for an end to rocket attacks that have rained down on Israel from Gaza and Lebanon, and for all those kidnapped to be released. After Palestinians from Gaza kidnapped a soldier, Israel seized dozens of Palestinians, mainly from the Hamas movement.

A UN spokeswoman in New York said Mr. Egeland had also travelled to Gaza City today where he met with the Commissioner General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), as well as with community members, UN and other agencies.

He also met with Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah, before tomorrow travelling on to Haifa, the spokesman added.

More than 100 Palestinians, many of them civilians have been killed in the last month alone in Gaza and Secretary-General Kofi Annan has called for "an immediate cessation of indiscriminate and disproportionate violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

Condemning violence in Côte d'Ivoire, Annan blames incitement by party leaders

25 July - Secretary-General Kofi Annan has strongly condemned attacks by a youth group in Côte d'Ivoire at the weekend, saying they were incited by recent "inflammatory statements" made by the leadership of the Front Populaire Ivoirien party with the aim of disrupting the identification process leading to national elections in the divided country.



Kofi Annan

"The violence resulted in the loss of human lives and an attack by Young Patriots on the vehicle of the High Representative for Elections, Mr. Gérard Stoudmann," Mr. Annan's spokesman said today in a statement, referring to the group of young supporters of President Laurent Gbagbo that has also been blamed for the January destruction of United Nations offices during violent protests in the western town of Guiglo.

In condemning such acts of violence, the statement added that they were in breach of the agreements reached among Ivorian parties, including those made at the meeting of high officials Mr. Annan convened in the country's capital, Yamoussoukro, on 5 July.

Mr. Annan urged all Ivorian parties to extend their full cooperation to Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny, as the Government presses ahead with the simultaneous implementation of the identification and disarmament processes that aim to end the civil strife that has kept the country divided between a rebel-held north and a Government-controlled south since 2002.

Annan applauds staging of international donors' conference in Haiti



25 July - Welcoming today's international donors' conference for Haiti, Secretary-General Kofi Annan called on donors to give generously so that the impoverished Caribbean nation can rebuild its economy and infrastructure.

The one-day conference, being held in the capital Port-au-Prince, follows presidential elections in February that were won by René Préval.

In a statement issued by his spokesman, Mr. Annan said "the fact that is being organized in Port-au-Prince for the first time illustrates the firm commitment of the Haitian authorities to shape their country's own destiny."

Urging donors to make generous pledges, the Secretary-General said international support remains essential as Haiti tries to rebuild its economic life and reform its rule-of-law institutions.

Darfur: UN envoy condemns killing of Sudanese officials at camp for displaced

25 July - The United Nations' top envoy to Sudan today condemned the killing of three Sudanese Government officials at a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the violence-plagued West Darfur region, and he urged community leaders to play a proactive role in preventing further violence.

In a formal statement today, Jan Pronk, Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Special Representative for Sudan, expressed concern about the lack of security and the resulting deterioration in conditions in IDP camps that last Thursday led to the three members of the State Water Corporation, who were testing water at the Hissa Hissa camp, being beaten to death by IDPs.



SRSR Jan Pronk

In many such camps, Mr. Pronk said, "the conditions for the conduct of humanitarian activities are no longer available or significantly affected by insecurity, which has been worsened by a wide availability of weapons."

According to the recently signed Darfur Peace Agreement, responsibility for the internal security of those IDP camps under Government control falls to the Government in cooperation with the African Union (AU) peacekeeping mission.

Mr. Pronk expressed hope that the AU will soon be able to re-establish its police presence in the camps, after it was suspended due to attacks on its personnel. "AU deployment inside IDP camps is crucial to ensure security within the camps and provide the adequate environment for humanitarian work," he said.

DR Congo: aid needed for thousands fleeing or returning in east, UN agencies say

25 July - United Nations agencies called today for more humanitarian aid for the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as thousands either flee their homes or return to decimated villages due to persistent violence in the run-up to historic national elections.

“These are the largest displacements that we’ve had to deal with in this region for at least two years, when the last heavy fighting occurred here,” said Felix Bamezon, DRC Country Director for the UN World Food Programme (WFP). “The historic elections are attracting the world’s attention but whatever the outcome, the need for food assistance will remain.”



Such mass displacement is particularly worrying in Gety, in Ituri Province, the WFP said, where some 38,000 people have taken refuge in the wake of recent fighting between recalcitrant militias and Government troops, and where stocks of food aid are running dangerously low.

At the same time, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that in the eastern Katanga Province about 2,200 families, or 80 per cent of those who fled recent clashes between Government and militia forces, have recently returned to the Sampwe area.

The returnees, according to a UN inter-agency assessment mission, found their houses destroyed and the harvest either ruined or looted by militia groups. They are in urgent need of shelter, basic household items, clothing, food rations, seeds and tools, which must be received before the rainy season.

UNHCR said it plans to distribute return packages and shelter construction kits to returns, with other agencies helping with assistance for other needs, but it warns that the risk of destabilization in such areas of Katanga remains high.

Meanwhile, in Gety, WFP said it distributed a two-week ration to 30,000 people on 14 July from its warehouses in Bunia, the main town of Ituri, but its stocks have almost run out in the area and more resources are urgently needed.

The food aid agency says it aims to feed 1.7 people in the DRC, but has received only 58 per cent of the \$253 million required for its relief and recovery operation in the country from January 2004 to June 2007, leaving a shortfall of \$106 million.

UN refugee chief visits Sri Lanka to discuss fate of 300,000 displaced by conflict



Edward Benson & residents of a new UNHCR-funded shelter

25 July - The head of the United Nations refugee agency begins a three-day mission to war-ravaged Sri Lanka today where he plans to meet representatives of the more than 300,000 people displaced by the conflict between the Government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The visit will be the first by a head of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to the country, where it has been working with conflict-displaced people since 1987, the agency said, adding that High Commissioner António Guterres is also expected to meet Government officials as well as members of the LTTE.

“The purpose of his visit is to meet displaced people in the north and east of the country and hear first-hand their concerns and needs. He will also meet UNHCR staff to discuss their humanitarian work,” UNHCR spokesperson Jennifer Pagonis told reporters in Geneva.

“In Sri Lanka, our activities are centred on providing protection for an estimated 314,400 internally displaced people, some

of whom have been out of their homes for more than 20 years.”

Since April this year, some 50,000 people have fled their homes because of renewed violence and are now living mainly in neighbouring communities in Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Puttalam and in the north of the country. UNHCR is monitoring the displacement and providing protection and humanitarian assistance to the newly displaced.

However, despite the deteriorating security situation in the north and east, a UNHCR-funded organisation in Jaffna is pushing ahead with construction of new shelters for people displaced or made homeless during the almost two decades of civil war.

The Jaffna Social Action Centre (JSAC) is building or upgrading more than 450 shelters across the Jaffna peninsula in the north for families living in makeshift shelters on their own land or still displaced since the 2002 ceasefire between the Government and the LTTE.

"We discussed the current situation and decided to overcome it," said Pathmanathan, JSAC's shelter project coordinator. "The people we are helping have been displaced for years. UNHCR has given us a golden opportunity to meet their needs so we just try to deal with the security problems."

Drought in Afghanistan prompts UN appeal for \$76 million



25 July - Warning that more than 2.5 million people are facing food shortages if they do not receive assistance, the United Nations and the Afghan Government today launched a joint appeal for \$76 million to deal with the country's emerging drought.

Insufficient rainfall during April and May means this year's rain-fed harvest of wheat, by far the country's most important cereal crop, is likely to be much lower than needed, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) noted in a statement released in Kabul.

UNAMA warned that the drought could force many households to consume their harvest much sooner than normal, sell their animals and other assets, and also turn to poppy cultivation as a means of income.

At the launch of the six-month appeal, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Christopher Alexander, described the situation as "a human crisis."

"It's not just a question of lack of rain," Mr. Alexander said. "It's a question of livelihoods being in jeopardy, children being unable to continue their study, people selling their livestock... families having to move."

Earlier this month the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) predicted that Afghanistan will face a shortfall of 700,000 tonnes of wheat because of the reduced rainfall. Droughts are a regular occurrence in Afghanistan, and this year the country's northern and north-western provinces have been hit particularly hard.

Funds gained from the appeal will be used to buy more than 67,000 tons of cereals, as well as feed concentrate, autumn and spring seeds, fertilizer and other commodities. The UN and the Afghan Government said they are also focusing on upgrading emergency water supplies in affected areas.

Bahrain terror bill is not in line with international human rights law – UN expert

25 July - An independent United Nations human rights expert today urged Bahrain's Government to amend a new counter-terrorism bill, expressing concern that the law could harm human rights in the country and would be "particularly troubling" as the Kingdom is a member of the newly constituted UN Human Rights Council.

The bill, titled "Protecting Society from Terrorists Acts," is awaiting ratification by the Head of State before becoming law,

but the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Martin Scheinin, called for the legislative and executive branches to “reconsider.”

“While fully conscious of the fact that States’ obligation to protect and promote human rights requires them to take effective measures to combat terrorism, I encourage the executive and legislative branches of Government to make amendments to this bill to bring it in line with international human rights law.

“Disregarding concerns based on international human rights standards would be particularly troubling in the case of a country that is a member of the newly constituted UN Human Rights Council.”

The Special Rapporteur wrote to the Government in March and again last month, when this bill was before Parliament, identifying some issues of concern regarding the proposed legislation and he also listed these four broad areas in today’s statement.

He said he was concerned that:

- the definition of terrorism is overly broad since there is no requirement of specific aim to commit a terrorist act and some acts are deemed to be “terrorist” without the intention of causing death or serious bodily injury – thus this definition goes against several human rights instruments;
- restrictions on freedom of association and assembly would allow the criminalization of peaceful demonstrations by civil society;
- excessive limitations are being placed on freedom of speech due to the use of broad and vague terms regarding the offence of incitement to terrorism since there is not a clear threshold for criminalization established;
- rights to due process would be denied because of the excessive powers of the Public Prosecutor regarding detention without judicial review.

Mr. Scheinin and other Special Rapporteurs are independent, unpaid experts with a mandate from the Human Rights Council.

Americas must prepare for bird flu, UN agencies and partners urge in new drive

25 July - Though no cases of avian flu or its H5N1 virus have been reported yet in birds or humans anywhere in the Americas, United Nations health agencies and other partners today launched a new preparedness campaign for the disease, which they say could reach the hemisphere at any time and possibly mutate into a human pandemic.

“We need to be prepared for H5N1 to enter the Western Hemisphere, whether it is through wild birds or commerce or a combination of the two. We should take this interval to get prepared,” said David Nabarro, senior UN system coordinator for avian and human influenza, in a message taped for a two-day meeting of health experts at the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) headquarters in Washington.

The new Inter-Agency Communication Framework for Avian and Human Influenza in the Americas sets forth a common approach for communicating with the media, government officials, the private sector and the general public, as part of ongoing efforts to prevent and prepare for avian and pandemic flu.

To date, H5N1 has been detected in birds in some 45 countries in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Middle East, spreading to 30 of those countries in just the past six months. The disease has prompted the death or culling of more than 200 million birds and has cost \$10 billion in economic losses in Asia alone. In 10 countries, the virus has infected humans, causing 231 cases and 133 deaths as of 20 July.

At the very least, the arrival of H5N1 in birds in Latin America and the Caribbean would represent a serious threat to the poultry industry. In addition, the virus could mutate into a strain that is easily transmissible between humans.



Polling in Latin America and the Caribbean shows low public awareness of the risks of avian flu, as well as widespread scepticism about the likelihood of H5N1 mutating into a human virus that could spark a pandemic. Few people in the region see the problems as requiring priority attention.

Among the goals of the communications campaign, the health experts plan to disseminate information on the spread of avian flu and actions to counter it, to build trust with public health officials and animal health officials, and to work with governments to bolster their own communications strategies.