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UN envoy to visit Iraq in two weeks for talks on broader role, official says



USG Lynn Pascoe

19 October - The new United Nations envoy for Iraq will travel to the country in two weeks for talks on a broader role for the world body there, a senior UN official told the Security Council today.

Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe presented the Council with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's latest report on Iraq, echoing the UN leader's assertion that "there is an opportunity today that should not be missed" for transforming recent positive developments – including the ceasefire declared by the Mahdi Army and the Sunni insurgent alliance against Al-Qaida – into a basis for achieving national reconciliation.

In August, the Council adopted resolution 1770 expanding the UN's role in Iraq, including in support of a national dialogue. Mr. Pascoe said the Secretary-General's new Special Representative, Staffan de Mistura, will immediately explore possibilities toward that end "when he reaches Iraq in two weeks."

Mr. Pascoe confirmed that the ceiling for international civilian staff in Baghdad has been raised from 65 to 85, adding that the number of staff authorized for the northern city of Erbil has risen from 29 to 35. In addition, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has "adopted an area-based approach that expands activities where circumstances are more permissible."

The Under-Secretary-General also issued a strong appeal for Member States to support the UN's efforts. "Importantly, the United Nations must be afforded the necessary political and humanitarian space to implement the new mandate and the



ability of the Organization to talk with all sides must be protected and respected,” he said.

“Security arrangements and financial and logistical backing are also essential for the success of the UN Mission in Iraq,” he added.

Mr. Pascoe voiced gratitude to countries now supporting the UN’s work in Iraq while urging States to provide additional resources for the mission. He pointed out that a trust fund established to support the ‘Distinct Entity’ that provides protection for the UN will be exhausted next month, while needs are clear “at least through 2008.”

He warned that, without an immediate infusion of funds, “the ability of the UN to operate in Iraq could be severely compromised.”

The magnitude of the challenges facing Iraq call for an international response which the UN is well-placed to meet, he said. “It is our belief that the new UN mandate, matched by strong international support, provides the necessary framework to move toward building a more stable Iraq.”

Secretary-General concerned at Turkish move on attacking Kurdish targets in Iraq

19 October - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon voiced concern today about the Turkish Parliament’s decision this week to enable the country’s armed forces to take cross-border military action in Iraq against targets of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).



Ban Ki-moon

“The Secretary-General strongly urges all sides to demonstrate restraint at this delicate juncture,” his spokesperson said in a statement released at United Nations Headquarters in New York. “He welcomes the affirmation by the Turkish Foreign Minister [Abdullah Gül] that Turkey is open to discussing all problems in Iraq.”

The statement added that Mr. Ban calls on the Iraqi Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to ensure that Iraqi territory is not used to mount cross-border attacks against Turkey.

“Recent attacks by the PKK inside Turkey have been rightly condemned by the international community,” it noted.

Security Council warns drug trafficking, other crimes imperil Guinea-Bissau



Security Council

19 October - Drug trafficking and organized crime are threatening to undermine the efforts of Guinea-Bissau to develop the rule of law, democracy and transparent governance and they are also destabilizing the wider West African region, the Security Council said today.

In a presidential statement read out by Ambassador Leslie Kojo Christian of Ghana, which holds the rotating presidency, Council members called for the United Nations to examine how it could boost its support of the country’s attempts to fight crime.

“The Security Council is especially concerned over the security and safety of Bissau-Guinean officials involved in combating drug trafficking and organized crime,” Mr. Christian said, stressing the need for concerted steps to protect those officials.

The statement welcomed the decision of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to hold a regional meeting on drug trafficking later this year, as well as plans to hold an international conference in Lisbon, Portugal, in December that will focus specifically on the impact of trafficking on Guinea-Bissau.

Today’s statement follows the report earlier this month of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the latest activities of the UN

Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), in which he warned that the drug trade was entrenching organized crime and reducing respect for the rule of law.

“There is no reliable data on drug seizures, the volume of drugs in transit through Guinea-Bissau or the local consumption of narcotics,” Mr. Ban wrote. “However, there is a growing consensus that Guinea-Bissau is a major drug trafficking transit point in the subregion.”

Anti-aircraft artillery have been deployed to the Bijagos archipelago after reports that unidentified aircraft have been transporting cocaine, and investigations resumed last month into the alleged involvement of several high-level officials of former prime minister Aristides Gomes in the disappearance of nearly 700 kilograms of cocaine seized by authorities.

The Council also agreed today to consider the Government’s request that Guinea-Bissau be included on the agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, set up a year ago to help countries emerging from conflict avoid sliding back into war or chaos. So far, the Commission has been focusing on Burundi and Sierra Leone.

UN agency transfers Congolese displaced in North Kivu to safer camps

19 October - Reacting to a humanitarian crisis which has driven hundreds of thousands of Congolese from their homes in the volatile North Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations refugee agency today announced a new drive to transfer the displaced to safer shelter.



Jennifer Pagonis, a spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters in Geneva that the Congolese who have been uprooted by violence are being moved “from congested makeshift settlements with very difficult living conditions to a new camp set up by UNHCR which has the essential basic facilities.”

A first group of 500 people moved from Ndosho – a makeshift settlement of some 1,000 people with no drinking water or basic sanitation – to the new camp at Buhimba six kilometres west of Goma, the main town in the area, she said.

Buhimba is the second camp developed by UNHCR for IDPs in the Mugunga area and it can accommodate more than 10,000 people. Bulengo, the first camp, reached its capacity of 10,000 IDPs at the end of September.

Meanwhile, displaced people continuing to arrive at sites around Goma. Aid agencies estimate over 370,000 IDPs have been displaced in North Kivu since December 2006.

“We fear many IDPs remain in areas inaccessible to humanitarian agencies as people continue to flee insecurity and fighting between the government forces, renegade troops and rebels in many parts of North Kivu,” said Ms. Pagonis.

“We are working closely with the authorities to identify additional sites.”

Ban Ki-moon proposes expediting Headquarters renovation project



19 October - Citing the need to make up for lost time and move ahead with renovating the United Nations Headquarters complex in New York, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has proposed a revised strategy that is “less risky, less expensive and faster” in the long run than the current seven-year, \$1.9 billion plan.

“The schedule has slipped,” Mr. Ban writes in his latest progress report on the UN Capital Master Plan (CMP), noting a slowdown in the project owing to planning and scheduling delays, as well as the loss of leadership following the resignation last year of the project’s Executive Director.

But the Secretary-General adds that although there have been delays, “steps are being taken to accelerate the project and

bring it in line with the schedule and budget” approved by the 192-member General Assembly – known as “strategy IV.”

Over the past year, the Assembly approved the financing of the plan and Skanska USA Buildings was selected as pre-construction manager. In addition, renowned United States architect Michael Adlerstein was appointed to lead the project as the new Executive Director.

Following these developments, “to recapture lost time and to expedite the project, the Office of the Capital Master Plan has developed a plan to accelerate the approved strategy IV,” Mr. Ban states.

“Accelerated strategy IV” would reduce the time needed during the renovation by reducing the total number of phases needed to refurbish the Secretariat and Conference Buildings, and speed up the construction of a temporary Conference Building.

It proposes the construction of the temporary Conference Building on the North Lawn as planned in early 2008, but would be able to complete the entire renovation by mid-2013 rather than mid-2016 as envisioned under the current strategy.

By this timetable, renovation of the Secretariat building would be completed in three years instead of six, starting early in 2009; the General Assembly building in two years instead of two and a half; and the Conference building in two years instead of three.

“The most appropriate way to execute the project would be to conduct the Secretariat renovation in one phase and execute the work in the Conference and General Assembly Buildings in single sequential phases as opposed to the three phases previously envisioned,” Mr. Ban writes.

In addition to the lease signed so far for space for 750 staff members, and the leases that are currently being negotiated, office space would need to be found for almost 1,500 other staff. The CMP office is already looking in Midtown and Lower Manhattan.

Along with changes to the sequencing, logistics and phasing of the project, Mr. Ban notes that efforts are being made to find changes in the actual design that would “bring the project back within budget and to find opportunities to reduce the costs in a way that does not compromise quality or functionality,” a process known as “value engineering.”

He adds that the projected cost of the renovation is estimated to be nearly \$2.1 billion as of September, which is almost \$220 million above the amount authorized by the General Assembly. “Most of the additional projected cost increases are due to the slippage of the schedule. Consequently, the impact of inflation on construction and rental costs has been exacerbated.”

The renovations under the CMP are expected to make the main UN Headquarters buildings – which have not been significantly improved or maintained since they were constructed in 1949 and 1950 – more energy efficient and eliminate safety and health risks.

Military impeding embargo inspections in Côte d’Ivoire, UN experts say

19 October - Côte d’Ivoire’s military is thwarting the surveillance of the arms embargo in the divided West African nation, a group of United Nations experts said in a new report made public today.

According to the Group of Experts monitoring the embargo, refusals to allow impartial forces to carry out inspections have been on the rise since the Ouagadougou Agreement was signed in March.

That pact sets out a series of measures to heal the split between the Government-controlled south and the rebel Forces Nouvelles-held north in 2002.

The latest report notes that the Group – which was established in early 2005 to gather and analyze information on arms



aches and flows in the region – conducted investigations on the ground in Côte d’Ivoire from late July until mid-August this year.

During those assessments, the Group “observed a lack of understanding on the part of certain Ivorian political authorities who believed that, with the signing of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement on 4 March 2007, their mission was out of step with the current reconciliation process.”

It also voiced concern about the illicit trafficking in firearms, given Côte d’Ivoire’s porous borders and the availability of weapons in the region.

“Furthermore, efforts to disarm and disband militias have, for the moment, been only partially effected,” the report said.

Regarding the country’s natural resources, the Group met for the first time with the heads of three of the four quasi-Government agencies in the coffee and cocoa sector, and confirmed “the lack of transparency in the management of revenue in the coffee and cocoa and hydrocarbons sectors.”

In contradiction to the diamond embargo preventing the exports of the precious stone out of the country, the Group reported that individuals interviewed in Seguela and Tortiya “unanimously acknowledged that most of the diamonds mined in Côte d’Ivoire are sent to Mali, but did not give details on the identity of the exporters or buyers.”

UN food agency chief deplures lack of security for aid workers in Sudan, Somalia



19 October - Following a spate of attacks on its staff in Somalia and Sudan, the head of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) today decried the lack of security for humanitarian workers in those countries.

WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran also condemned the continued detention of agency staff member Idris Osman, who was seized by armed men in Somalia on Wednesday.

“I condemn in the strongest possible terms the continued detention of WFP staff by the security forces,” she said in a statement.

“It has become extremely difficult for us to feed hundreds of thousands of hungry people in Mogadishu and throughout Somalia. We are operating in an environment which is fraught with insecurity: piracy, banditry and widespread violence. We need the government to protect humanitarian workers.”

The agency's workers trying to help Sudanese in the troubled Darfur region are facing similar constraints. Ms. Sheeran, referring to the killing yesterday of three contract drivers there, said “This brutal attack on World Food Programme truckers and others like it, severely limit our ability to distribute this vital food assistance. More than 3 million people are relying on us for their survival.”

Mr. Osman was seized on 17 October when up to 60 uniformed and armed members of Somalia National Security Service stormed a UN compound in Mogadishu. They took him to a cell at NSS headquarters, where he remains captive.

The agency said two of its officials on 18 October spoke by telephone with Mr. Idris, who said he was unharmed. WFP has been given no explanation for the reasons behind his detention.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon joined WFP in calling for Mr. Idris' immediate and unconditional release.

In Sudan, a series of attacks on WFP food truck convoys in the last week has resulted in the deaths of three WFP-contracted drivers. Two were shot dead in one incident on 16 October and another died in a second earlier incident on 12 October.

On Thursday 18 October, another incident occurred near Jebel Mara in South Darfur. According to initial reports, five WFP-

contracted trucks were stopped by 20 armed men. Two of the five trucks were stolen along with their cargo of relief food. All the drivers were released but some sustained injuries and all had been robbed.

Since the beginning of this year, WFP has had more than 20 attacks on convoys in Darfur plus many other security related incidents affecting staff and property.

Somalia: aid delivery impeded by 'suspicion' from Government, other parties – UN



WFP staffer Idris Osman

19 October - Humanitarian workers in Somalia – where the local head of the United Nations food agency was abducted earlier this week by Government forces – are impeded in their efforts to deliver aid and operate in a climate of “suspicion,” a world body official said today.

“The situation is always difficult in Somalia, has always been difficult and is probably going to be still difficult for some time,” said Eric Laroche, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, told reporters in New York.

He said that an upswing in violence among the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and other parties has resulted in “suspicion” from all sides towards the work of the humanitarian community in the Horn of Africa nation, which has had no functioning central government since Muhammad Siad Barre’s regime was toppled in 1991.

Mr. Laroche pointed out that the most recent example of this occurred on 17 October, when Idris Osman of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) was taken from a UN compound in Mogadishu.

According to WFP, dozens of uniformed and armed members of the country’s National Security Service (NSS) stormed the Organization’s compound, seized Mr. Osman and took him to a cell at NSS headquarters, where he remains captive.

So far, the WFP has not received any explanation for why Mr. Osman – who told two agency officials over the telephone yesterday that he is unharmed – is being detained.

Negotiations, Mr. Laroche said today, are at a “standstill,” stressing that this is a particularly difficult period to hold discussions with the Government because Somali Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Ghedi is currently out of the country and in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and also because of a possible vote of confidence at the Parliament in Baidoa.

WFP has suspended its operations in Mogadishu following Mr. Osman’s abduction, after only having resumed delivering food to 75,000 on 15 October. The agency had shut its operations down on 25 June after several fatal shootings.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon strongly condemned the incursion and called for Mr. Osman’s “immediate and unconditional release,” noting the Somali Government’s actions are in violation of international agreements.

The head of WFP today also deplored Mr. Osman’s detainment.

“It has become extremely difficult for us to feed hundreds of thousands of hungry people in Mogadishu and throughout Somalia. We are operating in an environment which is fraught with insecurity: piracy, banditry and widespread violence. We need the government to protect humanitarian workers,” said WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran.

Several months ago, the Coordinator visited Afgooye, 30 kilometres west of the capital Mogadishu, where the UN estimated that 100,000 people had been forced to flee the violence.

“The Government was saying that that was not acceptable and that was probably a wrong statement which meant that we were not telling the truth,” he said at today’s briefing. “But unfortunately we are saying the truth.”

Mr. Laroche said that during his assessment of the area to visit the internally displaced persons (IDPs), he was constantly

harassed and told by pro-Government parties, “you should not be here.”

Furthermore, he said he was trailed all the way back to the airport at the conclusion of his visit by the intelligence services.

Upon visiting the director of the country’s intelligence service, Mr. Laroche said that he was told that “if we go into zones that are not under the TFG control, we are feeding the terrorists.”

But, the Coordinator noted, the IDPs he met with in Afgooye – who were mostly women and children – included an orphaned eight-year-old girl who had lost not only her parents and sister, but also her arm. He stressed that “she is not a terrorist.”

Concerns of world’s vulnerable countries top UN Assembly’s agenda: President



Srgjan Kerim

19 October - The concerns of the world’s most vulnerable countries, including climate change and the need to reach global anti-poverty targets, top the agenda of the current session of the General Assembly, its president said today.

“Both development and the preservation of the environment are of greatest concern to the work of the General Assembly,” Srgjan Kerim told representatives in New York of least developed countries, land-locked developing countries and small island developing States. “The three groups of countries represented here today – almost half of the Member States of the General Assembly – are particularly exposed to economic and environmental challenges.”

Mr. Kerim said he would organize a thematic panel bringing together a range of players to discuss climate change early next year, adding that addressing that problem is central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of targets for tackling various social ills by 2015.

“At the mid-point for attainment of the Goals by 2015, I would like to focus the General Assembly’s attention on review of the progress in implementation of the MDGs, to recommitting efforts and resources to reach the agreed targets, and to build consensus for urgent collective action,” he said.

Pledging to address these issues in an inclusive and transparent manner, he urged countries to foster “a new climate of mutual trust and cooperation which would strengthen our ability to make meaningful and prompt progress.”

International Criminal Court signs protocol deal with Central African Republic



19 October - The International Criminal Court (ICC) has entered a protocol agreement with the Central African Republic (CAR) setting out the cooperation and protection that the Government will provide to court officials investigating whether war crimes have taken place in the impoverished country since 2002.

Bruno Cathala, the ICC registrar, signed the agreement with the CAR Justice Minister Thierry Maleyombo during a meeting yesterday in the capital, Bangui, according to a press statement released by the Court. Prime Minister Elie Doté was also present.

The agreement covers the conditions of operations for ICC teams – including investigators, security officials and witness protection officials – while they are working in the CAR and coincides with the opening of an ICC field office in Bangui.

Earlier this year the Government referred the issue of possible war crimes to the ICC, saying the national justice system was not capable of carrying out the complex investigations and proceedings necessary to launch prosecutions.

In May ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo announced his office would investigate, as it believed that “grave crimes

falling within the jurisdiction of the Court were committed,” particularly rape, during 2002 and 2003.

When the violence peaked in those two years during an armed conflict between the Government and rebel forces, civilians were killed and raped and homes and stores were looted, the ICC said, citing a preliminary analysis. The conflict was characterized by widespread use of rape, and the investigation marks the first time the Prosecutor is examining a situation where allegations of sexual crimes far outnumber alleged killings. Mr. Moreno-Ocampo said he would also monitor the current situation in the CAR to determine whether more recent events warrant further investigation.

DR Congo: UN mission hails transfer of suspect to International Criminal Court

19 October - The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) today welcomed the transfer of Congolese General and former militia leader Germain Katanga into the custody of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The 29-year old suspect, who faces charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, committed in 2003 in Ituri, yesterday became the second Congolese to be transferred to the ICC, following Thomas Lubanga, who has been charged with crimes relating to the recruitment of child soldiers in what is widely viewed as a milestone in international justice.

In a statement today, the UN mission, known as MONUC, congratulated the DRC Government “for taking this important step in the fight against impunity, and for its continued cooperation with the ICC.”

The mission pledged its support in helping the Government strengthen its own internal judicial proceedings for the worst crimes, noting that the ICC's jurisdiction is complementary to the primary jurisdiction of Congolese courts.

“MONUC reiterates its willingness to continue to assist the DRC's Government attempts to bring to justice all those who have been responsible for serious human rights violations, in conformity with its mandate.”

Prosecutors allege that Mr. Katanga was responsible for murders, inhumane acts and sexual enslavement at the village of Bogoro, constituting crimes against humanity and war crimes, and for cruel treatment at Bogoro constituting a war crime. They also allege he committed the war crime of using children to participate actively in hostilities, the war crime of launching an attack against the civilian population of Bogoro and the war crime of pillaging Bogoro.

In a statement yesterday, ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo said that more action can be expected. “We are selecting a third case. The DRC is still engulfed in violence. There is forced displacement of people, sexual violence of shocking brutality, and killings. It must stop. Perpetrators must know they will be prosecuted. The ICC is at work in the DRC.”

Ban Ki-moon, Israeli official stress importance of upcoming Middle East meeting

19 October - Next month's United States-sponsored international meeting will be critical to the Middle East peace process, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Ehud Barak emphasized today during talks at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Mr. Ban and Mr. Barak also discussed recent developments in the peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians, according to a readout provided by the UN.

The US-sponsored meeting, which is scheduled to be held in Washington, is designed to bring together key members of the international community, especially in the Middle East, to mobilize their support behind recent peace moves.

Last month the Middle East diplomatic Quartet, which comprises the UN, the US, the European Union and Russia, issued a statement calling for the Washington meeting to be “substantive and serious” so that the two sides can finally end their

conflict and devise a durable two-State solution.

During today's meeting, Mr. Ban also urged Mr. Barak "to take all possible steps to improve the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people and reaffirmed the UN's commitment to ensure that Palestinian humanitarian needs were being met."

The readout added that Mr. Ban briefed Mr. Barak on the work of the UN Interim Force on Lebanon (UNIFIL), which is trying to implement the Security Council resolution that ended last year's war between Israel and Hizbollah.

"He also told the Deputy Prime Minister that the UN would continue its efforts to secure the release of Israel's abducted soldiers. They touched on Iran as well."

UN peacekeepers open resource centre for Liberian schoolchildren

19 October - About 600 students will benefit from technical and vocational skills training at a new resource centre equipped with computers, sewing machines and a library, courtesy of Pakistani peacekeepers serving with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

The Pakistan-Liberia Friendship Centre is located in C. H. Deway High School in Tubmanburg, some 60 kilometres west of Monrovia, the capital of the West African nation that is seeking to recover from a brutal civil war that killed almost 150,000 people.

Pakistani contingent commander Brigadier General Ahmad Nawaz said the centre is the manifestation of the services rendered by his troops over the years to strengthen peace in Liberia. He reaffirmed the commitment of his troops to help improve the quality of education in Liberia.

"The centre signifies the love, cooperation and support given to the peacekeepers during the implementation of their assigned mandate," said General Nawaz, commending the local communities for making his contingent's mission enjoyable and fruitful through their friendly relations.

Rev. David Ballah, Principal of C. H. Deway High School, said the centre would help enhance the teaching-and-learning process in the school by giving students the opportunity to acquire skills through practice.

UNMIL Force Commander Lt.-Gen. Chikadibia Isaac Obiakor lauded the Pakistani contingent for their active involvement in building peace through community empowerment projects such as renovating schools, providing computers and educational materials, and skills training.

He called on Liberians to take the initiative to build their country, saying "self-help is a very necessary attribute in national development."

Established in September 2003, UNMIL supports the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the peace process; protects UN staff, facilities and civilians; bolsters humanitarian and human rights activities; and assists in national security reform, including national police training and the formation of a new, restructured military.



Haiti: UN peacekeepers rebuild school in troubled neighbourhood of capital



Haitian children in rebuilt school

19 October - More than 1,500 children in one of the most troubled neighbourhoods of Haiti's capital are attending classes again after soldiers serving with the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) helped to renovate a school building that had been left unusable by the violent activities of armed gangs.

At a ceremony yesterday, MINUSTAH officials handed over the keys for the Lycée Jacques Roumain in the Martissant district of Port-au-Prince, which re-opened last month and already has 1,576 students.

The school has been renovated, complete with new toilets, fences, a kitchen, repainted buildings and dozens of classroom benches for children, thanks to a joint effort involving MINUSTAH, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the national education ministry.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided much of the funding for the project, which cost about \$1.7 million.

Before it was rebuilt, the school had also served as the provisional local base for Haitian National Police (HNP) forces, UN Police (UNPOL) members and a contingent of Sri Lankan blue helmets with MINUSTAH as they tried to restore law and order to Martissant, which has been ravaged in recent years by armed gangs.

J. Carter, the head of MINUSTAH's civil affairs section, said "the school represents an office at the heart of a difficult district. The building is today the tangible symbol of hope for the local population of the district."

He added that the re-opening of the school provides an opportunity for locals to "break the vicious circle of violence and resume a life in security," noting also that economic activities in Martissant are resuming, local public institutions are functioning again and many displaced people have returned.

"It's a moment of joy and hope because this school and the education that it offers will contribute to building a better future for Haiti."

With UNICEF backing, Lesotho launches anti-measles drive

19 October - With financial backing from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Government of Lesotho has launched a major drive against measles that aims to reach nearly a quarter of a million children under the age of five.



The campaign involves over 530 vaccinating teams not only targeting measles but also providing children with Vitamin A and de-worming tablets.

Measles can cause severe health complications, including pneumonia, diarrhea, encephalitis, and blindness. This can seriously aggravate the already severe impact being caused by the complex humanitarian crisis affecting Lesotho, especially the effects of HIV and AIDS, UNICEF said, noting that the country has experienced a drastic increase in child and infant mortality rates over the past decade.

"These deaths and the incalculable loss of human potential they represent are more than needless. They are economically ruinous and, on the most fundamental human level, they are legally, morally and ethically unacceptable, because they are preventable through immunization" said Dr. Angela Benson, Representative of the World Health Organization which also supported the campaign.

Nationwide, more than 1,000 vaccinators are working at over 1,800 immunization sites in health centers, outreach posts and communities with the aim of reaching as many as 221,700 children under the age of five.

“This initiative seeks to kick start a process of regular child health days in Lesotho, to strengthen the routine vaccination, the surveillance system to detect communicable diseases at early stages and to immunize all children against the targeted infectious diseases,” said Aichatou-Diawara Flambert, UNICEF Representative in Lesotho.

“It is also a major step to address and reduce Lesotho's critical child and infant mortality rate.”

Of all the vaccine-preventable diseases, measles is still the leading cause of child death in many developing nations. Every year, some 2 million children die globally because they are not immunized against common childhood diseases.

UN's Standing Police Capacity completes training in UK

19 October - Ahead of their first operational deployment to Chad, the inaugural class of the United Nations' Standing Police Capacity (SPC) has completed two weeks of intensive training in policies, doctrine, project management, team-building, transitional justice and other aspects of modern peacekeeping at the United Kingdom's top police leadership centre.

Once fully operational, the SPC will have two main roles: to provide immediate start up capability on the ground for the police components of new United Nations peacekeeping operations and to facilitate rapid support and technical assistance on policing issues to existing UN missions as required.

“This course was extremely valuable in finalizing our training as a unit before we depart for our first mission, which is expected to be in Chad [MINURCAT],” said SPC Chief Walter Wolf.

“Organized crime, corruption and unprofessional practices present serious challenges to successful fulfilment of peacekeeping mandate so that it is essential to go into any such mission as well prepared as possible. This training ensured that the team is operational and fully prepared for deployment,” Mr. Wolf said.

Sixteen SPC officers attended the 8-19 October course, where they were mentored by senior trainers from several member states who led the group through real-time exercises based on actual policing scenarios. The SPC officers, which included five women, come from 14 Member States and have experience in more than two dozen peacekeeping operations.

“After completing this intensive course we now have the capacity to act as one cohesive, mutually-supportive team and to assist in start-up of future missions,” Mr. Wolf stated. He also expressed gratitude to the UK, Germany and Sweden for their support to the Department of the Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in running this course.

The concept of the Standing Police Capacity was first suggested in 2004 by a blue-ribbon group of experts brought together by the UN to examine security threats in the 21st century. Member States endorsed the concept during their World Summit in September 2005 as a way to deal with the unprecedented demand for peacekeepers in general and UN police officers in particular.