Ban Ki-moon unveils trust fund to back diplomatic efforts to end Darfur conflict

21 September - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today announced the creation of a trust fund to support next month’s Darfur peace talks after chairing a high-level meeting in which more than two dozen countries and regional groups pledged their support for the joint road map of the United Nations and African Union to end the conflict in the war-ravaged Sudanese region.

Today’s meeting at UN Headquarters in New York was “very constructive [and] useful… We will continue to build upon what we have reaffirmed” in the lead-up to the peace talks between the Sudanese Government and Darfur’s many rebel groups on 27 October in Libya, Mr. Ban told journalists tonight.

Mr. Ban, who co-chaired the high-level meeting with AU Commission Chairperson Alpha Oumar Konaré, said the trust fund would help facilitate the diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict, which has led to the deaths of more than 200,000 people since 2003.

He also said he would soon appoint a special negotiator to spearhead efforts to bring the many parties to the talks in Libya, which will be conducted under the auspices of the UN and AU envoys for Darfur, Jan Eliasson and Salim Ahmed Salim. Those talks must be the “final phase for a final settlement” of the Darfur conflict.

A joint AU-UN communiqué described the meeting as “a powerful illustration of the international community’s
commitment to work with the Sudanese to achieve peace in Darfur.”

Representatives from 26 States, including Sudan, the permanent members of the Security Council, key nations from the region and members of the AU Peace and Security Council, as well as officials from the European Union and the League of Arab States, attended today’s meeting.

Mr. Ban said there was unanimous support for the UN-AU three-track approach: securing a political solution; deploying the hybrid UN-AU peacekeeping force (to be known as UNAMID); and providing humanitarian and recovery assistance to civilians.

Some 4 million Darfurians now depend on humanitarian aid because of the fighting between rebels, Government forces and allied Janjaweed militia, which has displaced at least 2.2 million people from their homes and sometimes spilled into neighbouring Chad and the Central African Republic.

At full deployment UNAMID will have an estimated 26,000 troops and police officers, making it the largest peacekeeping operation in the world.

The Secretary-General said participants today stressed the importance of all parties taking part in the 27 October talks so that they are as “inclusive and decisive” as possible. Darfur’s rebel groups have become increasingly splintered since the conflict began.

In response to questions, Mr. Ban and Mr. Konaré reiterated their commitment to ensuring that UNAMID, which is slated to take over from the existing AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) at the start of next year, be deployed as quickly as possible.

Emphasizing the force will retain its predominantly African character, they noted that some specialist units will be provided by non-African countries and they called on all Member States to make pledges so that force generation and deployment benchmarks can be met.

The communiqué voiced concern about the continuing violence in Darfur, an arid and impoverished region in the remote west of Sudan, and the recent deterioration in the humanitarian situation.

The AU and the UN “called on all parties to exercise full restraint, abide by previous commitments, and cease all hostilities in the lead-up to political negotiations.”

It also noted that the implementation of the January 2005 comprehensive peace agreement ending the separate north-south civil war must not be neglected.

**Ambush and shooting of Darfur aid workers sparks outrage from UN relief chief**

21 September - United Nations humanitarian officials have deplored yesterday’s savage attack in the south of the war-wracked Darfur region in which a convoy of aid workers was ambushed and shot at by unknown gunmen.

Two of eight staff members of the non-governmental organization (NGO) World Vision International travelling in the convoy were shot in the head, while a third staff member was struck in the arm. The other five were hit by glass fragments and shrapnel.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said the UN arranged for medical evacuation for some of the staff following the attack near the village of Bulbul Timisgo in South Darfur state. Two people had to be flown to the capital Khartoum for medical attention, while one was treated in the provincial capital Nyala. All eight staff have survived the shooting.
“This is a horrifying and brutal attack on aid staff who are working to save the lives of Sudanese people,” Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes, who is also the Emergency Relief Coordinator, said in a statement released today in New York.

“We call on the Government of Sudan to act with all speed to identify those responsible and ensure that they are held accountable for their crime.”

Yesterday’s attack took place even though the convoy of two vehicles was clearly marked as humanitarian transport.

OCHA said the area in South Darfur where the attack occurred has been beset by banditry and violence this year, caused in part by clashes among rival Arab tribes.

Attacks against aid workers across all of Darfur are also on the rise, with the number of such incidents soaring by 150 per cent in the year to June. So far this year 98 vehicles have been hijacked, 105 staff temporarily taken hostage, 66 aid personnel physically or sexually assaulted and 61 aid convoys ambushed and looted.

OCHA said the attackers are invariably groups of armed men whose origin is difficult to determine with certainty.

NGOs, UN agencies and other groups have been providing relief to an estimated 4 million people affected by the conflict that has wracked Darfur since 2003, when rebels began fighting Government forces and allied Janjaweed militia. More than 200,000 people have been killed and at least 2.2 million others displaced.

This year the aid community is seeking $1.25 billion to fund its humanitarian operations across all of Sudan, including $652 million for Darfur, an arid and impoverished region on the country’s western flank.

Earlier this year the UN and the African Union authorized the establishment of a hybrid peacekeeping force (UNAMID) of some 26,000 troops and police officers to try to quell the violence in Darfur and to protect humanitarian operations.

From bell ringing in New York to battle scarred Afghanistan, UN marks Peace Day

21 September - From the ritual ringing of a bell at its stately Headquarters in New York to the furthest flung trenches of warfare across the world, where a record number of more than 100,000 peacekeepers are struggling to restore stability, the United Nations system today marked the annual International Day of Peace with fervent appeals for an end to violence.

“Peace is the highest calling of the United Nations - and for me personally,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared on the lawn in front of the towering UN Headquarters as he stood facing the Peace Bell, a gift from Japan cast from the pennies donated by children from 60 nations, before driving the ringing beam into it three times.

“Peace defines our mission. It drives our discourse. And it draws together all of our world wide work, from peacekeeping and preventive diplomacy to promoting human rights and development,” he added.

The International Day of Peace was first established by the UN General Assembly in 1981 as a day of global ceasefire and non-violence. The General Assembly called for people around the world to use the Day as an opportunity to promote the resolution of conflict and to observe a cessation of hostilities during it. UN staff throughout the world are observing a minute of silence in the name of peace.

Three UN Messengers of Peace stood at Mr. Ban’s side at the ceremony – Oscar-winning actor Michael Douglas, wildlife researcher and conservationist Jane Goodall and holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel.

A half a world away in Afghanistan, which has seen an upsurge in violence, thousands of people rallied behind the country’s
biggest-ever peace effort, even as fighting continued in the south. From Kandahar to Kunduz, from Herat to Jalalabad, peace events were taking place, and on a scale never seen before in the country, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said.

“You can’t hear about all that’s happening and not feel moved by it,” UNAMA Deputy Special Representative Bo Asplund said. “Today is an achievement for all people of this country. The demand for peace is overwhelming.”

Although Peace Day is marked each year on 21 September, this year in Afghanistan it has been the special focus of a two-month campaign in which UNAMA teamed up with Jeremy Gilley, founder of Peace One Day, actor Jude Law, and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to promote it. Scores of groups have joined in, including businesses, civil society, government, international donors, UN agencies, politicians, Afghan celebrities and performers, schools, municipal and regional authorities, and individual citizens.

Even warring factions promised to honour the Day by putting down their weapons so that 1.3 million children can be vaccinated against polio, with more than 10,000 vaccinators visiting areas in southern and eastern regions as part of the National Immunization Days organized by UNICEF, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) and the Health Ministry.

In Lebanon, where a beefed-up UN force of more than 13,000 blue helmets is seeking to keep the peace after last year’s war between Israel and Hizbollah, force commander Claudio Graziano summed up the overall hope at a ceremony at the cenotaph to UN peacekeepers who have fallen in the line of duty.

“Today is meant to get people not just thinking of peace, but doing something about it,” he declared. “Let us pledge our direct support for a worldwide ceasefire.”

In his speech, Mr. Ban referred directly to the global crises. “In countless communities across the world, peace remains an elusive goal,” he said. “From the displaced person camps of Chad and Darfur [Sudan] to the byways of Baghdad, the quest for peace is strewn with setbacks and suffering.

“Over the next few days [during the General Assembly annual General Debate], I will be convening high-level meetings on Darfur, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East, to seek to advance our quest for peace in those troubled lands. And I will be convening a high-level event on climate change. If we are to build enduring peace around the world, we need to protect the one and only planet we all share,” he added.

Today was the first time Mr. Ban has presided over the International Day of Peace and ever since he took office on 1 January this year he has made mitigating and reversing the impact of global warming a priority of his stewardship as the world’s top diplomat.

Following his speech and a minute of silence, the Japanese choir Tarumi Violinists performed and the UN Singers sang a “Song of Peace.”

Mr. Ban then attended the annual Student Observance at UN Headquarters, where 700 middle and high school students, including refugees from Peru and Sudan, exchanged views on the theme “Peace: A Climate of Change” via video conference with young people at the UN missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon and Sudan.

“Around me, I can see the next generation of scientists, business leaders, politicians, journalists, artists and civil society activists – perhaps even a future Secretary-General of the United Nations,” he told the youngsters. “In all of you, I can see the future of the United Nations, and of our world. Your energy and idealism make that future look bright.

“By participating in this International Day of Peace, you are demonstrating that you already know better that to repeat the mistakes of the past. You will choose to talk rather than fight. You will listen rather than shout. You will cooperate rather than condemn. You will protect our environment rather than over-exploit it.”
Four new Messengers of Peace designated to raise awareness on UN’s work and ideals

21 September - Marking the International Day of Peace, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today designated four internationally renowned individuals – an equestrian, a conductor, an author and a violinist – to join the ranks of other United Nations Messengers of Peace raising global awareness of the world body’s work and ideals.

As a Messenger, acclaimed conductor and pianist Daniel Barenboim of Israel and Argentina will promote peace and tolerance through the globally shared language of music.

He served as Music Director of the Chicago Symphony for 15 years, and in 1999 co-founded the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra with Palestinian scholar Edward Said to bring young musicians from Israel and the Arab countries together to further dialogue among Middle East cultures.

“Music teaches us to express ourselves to the fullest whilst simultaneously listening to the other,” Mr. Barenboim said in his acceptance of the role. “I will do my very best to carry this message to all the corners of the world.”

Brazilian Paulo Coelho, author of the bestseller “The Alchemist,” also seeks to promote intercultural dialogue in his position as Messenger. Through his Paulo Coelho Institute which he founded with his wife Christina Oiticica, he helps underprivileged member of his home country’s society.

“I gladly accept this responsibility and am committed to do my best to work towards a better future for the current and next generations,” said Mr. Coelho, who also serves as Special Counsellor for Intercultural Dialogues and Spiritual Convergences for the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In 1982, Japanese-American violinist Midori Goto made her historic debut at the age of 11 with the New York Philharmonic. Since then, she has pushed for the recognition of the potential of children through her non-profit foundation Midori & Friends, which brings music education programmes to thousands of underprivileged children yearly.

As Messenger of Peace, Ms. Goto will advocate for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight targets to slash a host of social ills by 2015, as well as build on her commitment to youth.

In accepting this new role, she said that “this is an opportunity to champion the United Nations’ Millennium Goals in a meaningful way.”

Also promoting the MDGs as Messenger is Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein of Jordan, First Lady of Dubai, who has served as a Goodwill Ambassador for the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and is also the first Arab woman to compete in equestrian events at the continental, world and Olympic levels.

“I really do believe that unless we really tackle the root causes of hunger and poverty, then we remain far from peace,” she told reporters at a press conference moderated by Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Kiyotaka Akasaka in New York today.

Having previously travelled to Malawi and Ethiopia on behalf of WFP to spotlight the food crises in the two African nations, Princess Haya – the first Arab and the first woman to serve as a Goodwill Ambassador for the agency – will focus on drawing attention to the MDGs, eight targets to slash socials ills by 2015.

“I really believe that the WFP in so many ways gave me the complete foundation to be able to be here today,” she noted.

These four distinguished individuals join primatologist Jane Goodall of the United Kingdom, Academy Award-winning
actor Michael Douglas, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel and cellist Yo-Yo Ma as UN Messengers of Peace.

“All these different problems that face us today – the environmental ones and the social ones and they’re all linked – and if we laid down our weapons tomorrow and had a moment of peace, this wouldn’t last very long unless we learn to conserve the natural world on which we depend,” Ms. Goodall, who champions environmental causes, said at today’s press briefing.

Holocaust survivor Mr. Wiesel highlighted the importance of using one’s past to help others. It is necessary to help others and to “speak of our experience, of our ideas from sadness occasionally,” he said. “And nevertheless it’s possible to do something so we will not be sad.”

Mr. Douglas, who is committed to disarmament issues, including nuclear non-proliferation and halting the global trade in small arms and light weapons, told reporters that “the reality it seems to me that with all the humanitarian gestures in the world, all of the aid efforts that we all can make, unless there is peace in that region, it doesn’t work.”

Also at the briefing, Mr. Akasaka paid tribute to Italian opera singer and Messenger of Peace Luciano Pavarotti who passed away earlier this month, lauding the famed tenor who “devoted so much time and support to the United Nations.”

**General Assembly sets out its work programme for annual session**

21 September - The General Assembly today agreed to consider 163 agenda items during the annual session that began this week but decided for the fifteenth consecutive year to exclude a bid by some Member States to discuss the representation of Taiwan, Province of China in the world body.

In a vote by consensus after a marathon debate on the Taiwanese item involving more than 110 speakers, Assembly members adopted the recommendation of the General Committee on the allocation of agenda items during this session, its sixty-second.

The 163 agenda items that were approved include questions of international peace and security, sustainable development, human rights, development in Africa, humanitarian assistance, justice and international law, disarmament and the fight against drugs, crime and terrorism. It also includes many organizational and administrative matters.

But Assembly members agreed with the General Committee’s recommendation not to include the item entitled “urging the Security Council to process Taiwan’s membership application pursuant to rules 59 and 60 of the provisional Rules of the Procedure of the Security Council and Article 4 of the Charter of the United Nations.”

Ambassador Tamsir Jallow of Gambia said Taiwan deserved its own membership in the UN because it was not a part of China and had an independent government and economy. Continuing to deny the membership infringed the human rights of Taiwan’s 23 million people, he said.

Mr. Jallow said it was unfortunate that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had returned a letter sent to him by Taiwan’s President Chen Shui-bian asking Mr. Ban to refer the matter of the membership application to the Security Council.

But Chinese Ambassador Wang Guangya said the decision reflected the common will of a majority of UN Member States and there was no doubt that Taiwan was a part of China. He said no other sovereign State would allow one of its regions to apply for UN membership.

Mr. Wang also said that General Assembly resolution 2758, adopted in 1971, had long resolved the matter.

**Georgia: Ban Ki-moon urges restraint following deadly incident**

21 September - Expressing concern at reports of yesterday’s deadly incident in Georgia between units of the Ministry of the
Interior and Abkhaz *de facto* personnel, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called for restraint on all sides.

Two Abkhaz were reportedly killed and several others wounded or taken prisoner in the incident.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, the Secretary-General called on all parties “to exercise maximum restraint and to prevent any further escalation of the situation.”

The UN Observer Mission in the country, known as UNOMIG, is currently conducting an investigation, spokesperson Michele Montas said.

In a report to the Security Council in July, Mr. Ban urged the Government and Abkhaz sides to bolster cooperation on security, economic and humanitarian issues, and noted that the parties must “redouble their efforts to avoid action that could lead to a renewal of hostilities.”

Fighting in the country 14 years ago drove nearly 300,000 people from their homes.

UNOMIG was established in August 1993 to verify compliance with the ceasefire agreement between the Government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities in the country. Its mandate was expanded following the signing by the parties of the 1994 Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces.

In an April resolution, the Council voted unanimously to extend UNOMIG’s mandate by six months until October.

**UNICEF continues providing relief to millions of flood-ravaged South Asians**

**21 September** - Nearly three months after the start of torrential rains, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and its partners are assisting millions of people across Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan still impacted by the resulting floods and landslides.

According to the Indian Government, 2,614 people have died while 48 million have suffered as a result of flooding. In the hardest-hit state of Bihar, UNICEF, with Government support, is setting up 50 maternity health camps, two nutritional rehabilitation centres to treat severely malnourished children and over 250 alternative learning spaces for 60,000 students.

Elsewhere in India, UNICEF and other organizations are providing emergency medical care, water purification supplies. They are also working to communicate messages about safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as working with education officials to re-open schools or establish alternative learning spaces.

Over 600,000 flood-impacted people throughout the country have been treated by UNICEF-backed fixed and mobile medical teams.

Bangladesh is recovering from a second wave of flooding, and to date, 946 people have died and 13.3 million others were affected. UNICEF and other UN agencies have completed a rapid needs assessment in the areas sustaining the most damage.

So far, UNICEF has distributed nearly half of the 380 metric tons of fortified biscuits in its stocks, along with 9,000 family kits, 5,500 recreational kits, 1,500 emergency education kits and 47,000 plastic sheets.

The Nepal Red Cross Society reported 185 deaths and over 580,000 people being affected by the severe flooding and landslides due to monsoons. UNICEF has provided 12,000 families with supplies, including hygiene kits and water purification supplies.

Almost 4,000 bottles of water purification agents have been supplied to the People’s Liberation Army in UN-monitored
UNICEF is endeavouring to distribute 40,000 medicated bed nets, rehabilitate dozens of damaged water systems in 24 districts and supply school kits to bolster the education of some 20,000 children. The agency is also supporting the training of female community health volunteers who will launch a hand-washing campaign and hand out water purification agents in seven districts.

In Pakistan, where 420 people have died and over 377,000 people still have not been able to return to their damaged homes, UNICEF has stepped up efforts to provide safe drinking water and essential medical supplies while supporting the education system and assisting the most vulnerable women and children.

It has also provided safe drinking water for over 227,000 people, helped vaccinate 224,000 children against measles and supplied 153 School-in-a-box kits, each containing such items as flipchart pads, markers, pens, crayons, erasers, exercise books, rulers, pencils, chalk and chalkboards.

UNICEF has also supported the creation of 80 mobile child protection teams as well as 40 child and women-friendly spaces to protect 300,000 vulnerable girls, boys, women and their families, as well as the nutritional screening and distribution of fortified food for some 3,000 malnourished children and pregnant and lactating women.

**Somali authorities deplore denial of entry to UN rights expert, invite him back in**

21 September - An independent United Nations expert on human rights in Somalia who was denied entry to the town of Baidoa earlier this week and asked to travel back to Nairobi, Kenya, has been invited back in.

“The UN Political office for Somalia (UNPOS) says that the Somali authorities have deplored the incident and have since invited Mr. [Ghanim] El Najar to return to complete his mission, saying that his expulsion had been the result of a misunderstanding.” UN spokesperson Michele Montas told a news briefing in New York.

Given the poor security situation inside the strife-torn Horn of Africa country, UNPOS, which was set up in 1995, has been working from Nairobi, with officials making visits to Somalia.

Somalia has been riven by factional fighting and has had no functioning central government since Muhammad Siad Barre’s regime was toppled in 1991.

**UN reports nearly 50 per cent increase in Iraqi asylum-seekers in industrialized world**

21 September - Almost 20,000 Iraqis applied for asylum in industrialized countries in the first half of this year, up 45 per cent on the previous six months, reflecting the unrelenting violence in the strife-torn country, according to provisional statistics released by the United Nations refugee agency today.

If current trends are maintained, by the end of the year the number of Iraqi asylum seekers might reach the levels witnessed between 2000 and 2002, when an average of 40,000 to 50,000 Iraqis sought asylum each year in the 36 industrialized countries included in UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics.

An estimated 2.2 million Iraqis are currently outside their home country, primarily in neighbouring countries such as Syria and Jordan, which are not included in the industrialized country statistics.

UNHCR, using information provided by governments, said about 19,800 asylum claims were lodged in the 36 industrialized countries during the review period, compared to 13,600 in the second half of 2006. The 2007 figures are more than double those for the first six months of last year, when a total of 8,500 asylum applications were submitted.
Some 9,300 applications, or almost half of all requests, were submitted in Sweden. The large Iraqi community there and its strong social network might account for the high number. Greece registered some 3,500 asylum claims, compared to 1,400 during the whole of 2006, while Spain and Germany recorded 1,500 and 820 applications respectively.

When all nationalities are taken into account, the United States was by far the largest recipient of new asylum claims during the first six months of 2007 with an estimated 26,800, some 1,200 more than during the second semester of 2006. Sweden remained the second largest with a total of 17,700, a 14 per cent increase over the second half of last year.

Over the past few years, the overall number of asylum claims in the industrialized countries has decreased continuously, but the trend was reversed in the second half of last year when numbers started to rise. Assuming current patterns remain unchanged, it can be expected that asylum claims lodged in industrialized countries in 2007 might be between 290,000 and 320,000, the first annual increase since 2001.

The main countries of origin in the first six months of this year were Iraq (19,800), China (8,600), Pakistan (7,300), Serbia and Montenegro (7,200) and the Russia (6,500). Separate statistics for Serbia and the recently independent Montenegro are not available.

Iraqi cholera outbreak widens to include first case in Baghdad – UN health agency

21 September - The cholera outbreak in northern Iraq has spread south to the capital Baghdad and more than 1,500 cases have now been confirmed across the country, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) reported today.

UN spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters at UN Headquarters in New York that Baghdad recorded its first confirmed case of the disease two days ago.

Iraqi health officials had warned in recent days that the continuous movement of people and cargo, bad sanitary conditions and high temperatures increased the possibility that the disease would spread rapidly to other areas such as Baghdad and the central provinces.

Northern Iraq has been plagued by cholera cases since last month, when the first cases were reported in Kirkuk province. It remains unclear what caused the initial outbreak although polluted water and cracked water pipes contaminated by sewage may be to blame.

Nearly 30,000 cases of diarrhoea have been confirmed so far in the north, Ms. Montas said, and WHO is reporting 10 deaths in the Sulaymaniyah area.

Cholera is an acute intestinal infection caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. It causes watery diarrhoea that can quickly lead to severe dehydration and death if treatment is not promptly given. About 80 to 90 per cent of cases are mild or moderate and are difficult to distinguish clinically from other types of acute diarrhoea.

UN-backed $41 million emergency appeal launched for flood-ravaged Ugandans

21 September - A United Nations-backed flash appeal was launched today for $41 million to provide urgently-needed assistance some 300,000 flood-beleaguered Ugandans, including more than 100,000 already vulnerable internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Since July, downpours have resulted in severe flooding across many parts of the country’s east, centre and north.

“We are here as one humanitarian community comprising United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations [NGOs], the donor community and, most importantly, the Government and people of Uganda, to call for support in
addressing the devastation left behind by the rising tide of water,” said Theophane Nikyema, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the country, in Soroti, the largest town in the hardest-hit Teso sub-region.

Areas where a majority of households depend on subsistence agriculture and where basic services are operating beyond capacity were severely impacted. This was especially true of Teso, where neither the Government nor humanitarian organizations have the capacity to meet needs. In response, today’s appeal focuses primarily on delivering aid to this sub-region.

The $41 million appeal will provide assistance to some 50,000 households which have suffered damaged homes and are at risk for waterborne disease outbreaks due to severely damaged water and sanitation facilities. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that the incidence of malaria, diarrhoeal diseases and acute respiratory infections has already surged by as much as 30 per cent.

Among the priorities set by the humanitarian community in Uganda for this appeal are stabilizing the initial food security situation, preventing disease outbreaks, bolstering capacity to respond to health emergencies, re-opening schools and ensuring access to primary education and providing urgently needed shelter and supplies.

While a two-month “hunger gap” is considered the norm, according to OCHA, this year it is expected to stretch into ten months, given the loss by many of their first season harvest and the delay in planting for the second season.

Heavy rains are forecast through November, which is likely to extend the scope of the flooding and further impact the already-affected population.

In a related development, the Uganda country team of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), an OCHA-convened body, today called for the continued commitment by the Government and the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) to the peace process to end their bloody two-decade-long conflict.

The Committee – comprising UN agencies, NGO consortia, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross/International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent and the International Organization for Migration – appealed to both sides to return to the negotiating table.

“The humanitarian, security and human rights situation in northern Uganda has visibly improved since the end of aggressive activities heralded by the Cessation of Hostilities agreement of 26 August 2006,” the IASC said in a statement issued on the International Day of Peace.

Thousands of civilians have been killed or abducted since the LRA began its rebellion in 1986, and more than 1.5 million people have become refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Many of the people driven from their homes by the conflict have started returning to their villages of origin, with over half a million people already having returned while almost 400,000 have begun moving to transit nearer their homes. IASC noted that fewer than 1 million IDPs remain in the main camps.

“However,” the group said, “the linchpin in securing a peaceful, just and durable – and therefore more prosperous – future for all Ugandans is the conclusion of a final and lasting agreement between the Government and the LRA.”

The IASC also pledged its support in northern Uganda’s transition to a post-conflict environment where people can resume their normal lives and their livelihoods.
UN-backed tribunal in Cambodia details charges against ex-Khmer Rouge leader

21 September - The former Khmer Rouge leader Nuon Chea faces charges of having planned and ordered the murder, torture and enslavement of civilians during the regime’s rule over Cambodia in the late 1970s, according to a statement issued by a United Nations-backed war crimes tribunal today.

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), based in the capital Phnom Penh, detailed the charges that Nuon Chea, 81, faces in a statement explaining why it has decided to place him in provisional detention for a year.

You Bunleng and Marcel Lemonde, co-investigating judges of the ECCC, said Nuon Chea – also known as “Brother Number Two” in the Khmer Rouge – was being remanded in custody because he posed a potential threat to witnesses and victims and was also a flight risk.

In addition, the judges said that the charges are so grave that if he were released, it was possible there could be “protests of indignation which could lead to violence and perhaps imperil the very safety of the charged person.”

Nuon Chea is charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes over his actions in various senior positions with the Communist Party of Kampuchea between April 1975 and January 1979.

He is alleged to have “planned, instigated, ordered, directed or otherwise aided and abetted in the commission” of numerous crimes against humanity, namely murder, torture, imprisonment, persecution, extermination, deportation, forcible transfer, enslavement and other inhumane acts.

He is also accused of war crimes on the basis of breaches of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, including wilful killing, torture, inhumane acts, wilful deprivation of rights to a fair trial and unlawful confinement.

The statement noted that Nuon Chea disputes the charges, saying that he would be ashamed to have committed such crimes. He contends that all real power during the Khmer Rouge rule was in the hands of its Military Committee, of which he was not a member, and he has also told the court that he also lost 40 family members during the period in question.

In a separate press statement released today, the ECCC announced that Nuon Chea had selected a Cambodian lawyer, Son Arun, to represent him. He said he does not have the means to pay for a lawyer so the work of Mr. Son will be funded by the ECCC until Nuon Chea’s claim is assessed.

Under an agreement signed by the UN and Cambodia, the ECCC was set up as an independent court using a mixture of Cambodian staff and judges and foreign personnel. It is designated to try those deemed most responsible for crimes and serious violations of Cambodian and international law between 17 April 1975 and 6 January 1979.

Afghan Government and people want talks with Taliban, UN envoy says

21 September - Afghanistan’s Government and its people are open to negotiations with the Taliban in the interests of ending the fighting there, a top United Nations envoy said today – the International Day of Peace, when thousands of Afghans marched in commemoration even as deadly violence exploded in parts of the country.

Speaking to reporters in New York, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative, Tom Koenigs, pointed to the activities across Afghanistan in observance of the Day as evidence of a deep-seated desire for lasting security.

“What we take from this broad support is there is a cry for peace in Afghanistan, from the civil society – from everybody –
and there are possibilities for peace,” he said.

At the same time, the envoy acknowledged the outbreak of “war-like violence” in Helmand province and also in the capital Kabul, where a French soldier was killed today along with a civilian by an improvised explosive device (IED) which wounded a number of others.

The UN will “continue to build on this broad support” for peace, marked by wide public and official calls for negotiations with the Taliban.

“It is obvious that among those who support the Taliban and even among those who support their violent actions, there are quite a number of people who are tired of war and who respond to the cry of the people for peace,” said Mr. Koenigs.

At the same time, he cautioned against expectations of an immediate change. “These negotiations we cannot expect to come to a quick result.”

The fact that the talks are called for “opens a possibility to act for those who might feel in charge to follow this up,” he said.

“We from the United Nations will certainly support peace talks because the insurgency cannot be won over by military means only and we have to keep the door open for negotiations,” he added.

“We don’t expect that the hardcore of the Taliban will negotiate, but there are certainly tribes who are alienated who can be brought back.”

Mr. Koenigs said negotiations must be based on the Afghan Constitution.

“We call also for support of peace initiatives by the neighbouring countries,” he said, terming the Afghan-Pakistani frontier “a very difficult border.” A coordinated effort to address this problem is necessary, he said.

Mr. Koenigs heads the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which is currently working to provide political and strategic advice for the peace process and carry out other tasks, including promoting human rights and managing all UN humanitarian relief, recovery, reconstruction and development activities in coordination with the Government.

**UN human rights officials probe killings, violence in south-central Nepal**

21 September - United Nations human rights monitors are investigating the situation in south-central Nepal, where there have been reports of violence, killings and other atrocities in the past week since the death of a local leader.

Richard Bennett, the Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal, told a press briefing today in Kathmandu that the monitors “will stay as long as necessary in order to conduct a thorough investigation into this week’s tragic incidents.”

The monitors are on a joint mission with officials from the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) to assess the situation in and around Kapilvastu, where local leader Mohit Khan was killed last week.

In the wave of violence that followed, a police officer was killed and Mr. Bennett said that “in the last couple of days there have been reports of many more killings and of various atrocities committed against victims.”

Mr. Bennett, who visited Kapilvastu this week, said many locals are frustrated by what they say is Government inaction since the initial killings last weekend. Many residents were displaced in the violence and they have received no humanitarian relief. Law and order has also not been restored in some areas.
“Inadequate public security is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges to human rights – and the peace process – in Nepal today,” the newly appointed Representative said, adding that the violence in some areas, from both armed groups and the security forces, is jeopardizing the ability to hold free and fair Constituent Assembly elections that are scheduled for November.

He said an equally serious problem was the widespread impunity for those who carry out breaches of human rights and international humanitarian law, with many crimes not investigated at all.

“Ending impunity will require further strengthening of the legal framework,” said Mr. Bennett, who called on the Nepalese Government to do more to meet its international treaty obligations.

**More UN officials voice concern at Israel’s declaration of Gaza as ‘hostile territory’**

21 September - United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour has voiced grave concern over Israel’s decision to declare the Gaza Strip a “hostile territory” and to announce military action, additional restrictions on the movement of people and goods to and from the area, and reductions in the supply of fuel and electricity.

“The implementation of such measures would impose an unbearable burden on the civilian population of Gaza, which has already paid a heavy price from daily violence, isolation and deprivation,” Ms. Arbour said in a statement released last night.

She condemned once again the indiscriminate firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel and urged Israel to exercise restraint, recalling that it has the obligation under international humanitarian and human rights law to protect its population without employing disproportionate means. She also recalled that international law prohibits reprisals and collective punishment.

Ms. Arbour’s statement was the latest expression of concern by UN officials. On Wednesday, when the Israel decision was announced, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the 1.4 million people in Gaza, including the old, the young and the sick, who are already suffering from the impact of prolonged closure, should not be punished for the unacceptable actions of militants and extremists.

Yesterday, the Bureau of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People voiced “great alarm” and called on Israel to reverse the move.

“We consider this decision to be a violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, and yet another form of collective punishment of the Palestinian people, which, if implemented, is bound to substantially worsen the already deplorable living conditions of the civilian population in the occupied Gaza Strip,” it said in a statement.

It reiterated its position condemning “the killing of innocent civilians by both sides, including Israeli military operations and the firing of rockets and mortar rounds by Palestinian groups. Such attacks by both sides must be stopped immediately, and those responsible must be brought to justice,” it added.

It warned that the decision “may considerably complicate current efforts of the international community to revitalize the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and prevent the Palestinian Authority from promoting and marshalling public support for dialogue towards peace. Nobody, including the Israeli people, will benefit from such a scenario,” it added.
Myanmar: No choice but to pursue dialogue, UN envoy tells Security Council

21 September - The United Nations has no choice but to keep using the Secretary-General’s good offices to try to find solutions to the challenges facing Myanmar, the UN envoy to the country has told the Security Council in a briefing following the recent wave of peaceful protests in the Asian nation that led to numerous arrests by authorities.

Ibrahim Gambari, the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Myanmar, told Council members yesterday that UN chief Ban Ki-moon remains deeply concerned about the conditions of those people in detention, especially those who are reportedly on hunger strike.

He said Mr. Ban hopes that the authorities in Myanmar will heed the calls worldwide for the release of these new detainees, as well as all other political prisoners.

“Undoubtedly the developments over the last few weeks in Myanmar have raised serious concerns in the international community and once again underscore the urgency to step up our efforts to find solutions to the challenges facing the country,” Mr. Gambari said.

The envoy, who has been consulting again with key capitals recently, said discussions are still under way with the Government of Myanmar about when he will make his next official visit to the country.

Reiterating his comment earlier this month that the latest events are a clear setback for Myanmar, Mr. Gambari said “we have no choice but to persevere” through the Secretary-General’s good offices and with the support of the international community to build on the trust and confidence that has developed so far and work with all relevant parties to try to “move events in the right direction.”

The demonstrations began last month in protest at a surge in fuel prices and the protesters have included many of the country’s monks.

Schools leave out 14 million children in ex-Soviet Union, Eastern Europe each year – UN

21 September - The education systems in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States comprising the now-independent former Soviet republics are excluding more than 14 million children each year in a region formerly known for its high-quality education, according to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

“This situation will lead to intergenerational cycles of poverty, and undermine the capacity of governments to develop globally competitive economies based on skilled labour rather than cheap labour,” UNICEF’s regional director Maria Calivis warned at this week’s release of a new report – Education for Some, more than Others.

In spite of the economic recovery and increased public expenditure on education in many countries over the past decade, most national education systems are struggling to provide universal education, the study concludes. A key indicator was that there are an estimated 2.4 million ‘missing children’ of primary-school age and almost 12 million missing secondary-school children who should be in school but are not.

Ms. Calivis said that meant more than 14 million children entered adult life every year without any kind of formal education or school diploma and this in a region largely known for its former high levels of access, quality and equality in education.

The report found that public expenditure on education reinforced rather than counteracted social, ethnic and economic
inequalities in access to and completion of basic education. Family background, mainly parents’ income but also education, had increasingly become a determinant in enrolment and attendance, particularly at pre-school level.

Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan, countries with low economic indicators, had the lowest attendance rates, less than 50 per cent for upper high school, and in some instances less than 30 per cent for pre-school.

The situation of the Roma children and gender inequality were also major issues in some countries. In three with the largest Roma communities – Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania – only a tiny proportion of Roma have any schooling beyond primary, compared to non-Roma. Roma educational attainment ranges from 10 per cent to 35 per cent in secondary school while only 1 per cent of Roma across the region attended higher education.

The report also shows that no country was achieving equal representation of girls in basic education but the numbers were close, 95 girls to 100 boys on average. The most striking aspect of the figures was the feminization of higher education throughout the region. Girls outnumbered boys, in most cases significantly, in all countries except Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkey and Azerbaijan. Only Turkey and Tajikistan were in trouble to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of eliminating gender disparity at all levels of education by 2015.

The report calls for governments to substantially increase spending on education to at least 6 per cent of their gross domestic product as against a regional average of 3 to 4 per cent, and move from a distribution of public expenditure that reinforces inequality to one that counteracts inequality.

**UN health agency stresses need to ensure safety of children’s medicines**

*21 September* - The lack of thorough and reliable clinical data on the way medicines affect children, particularly side effects, requires strengthened safety monitoring and vigilance of medicinal products, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) warned today.

“We need to learn more about the way children’s bodies react to medicines so we can improve global child health,” WHO Assistant Director-General for Health Technology and Pharmaceuticals Howard Zucker said as the Agency released a new report – Promoting Safety of Medicines for Children.

“That’s why it’s extremely important to keep track of potential side effects in child populations. Ultimately, this will save lives and build up a knowledge base for the future,” he added of the study, which is intended for policy-makers, manufacturers, medicines control bodies and researchers.

It gives an overview of the problem and offers solutions on how best to address side effects from medicines in children through improved reporting systems and collaboration between governments, regulatory authorities, research institutions and the pharmaceutical industry, and is part of a broad effort WHO is initiating to expand children’s access to quality-assured, safe and effective medicines.

A large proportion of side effects or adverse reactions to medicines in the adult population are due to irrational use or human error and are therefore preventable. In the case of children, even more factors come into play. The main challenge is the lack of clinical data, resulting in fewer medicines being developed, produced and marketed specifically for children. Often, children are given medicines that have only been tested in adults and are not officially approved for use in child populations.

Non-availability of appropriate paediatric formulations forces health care providers to resort to administering portions of crushed or dissolved tablets or the powder contained inside a capsule without any specific indication of the required dosage. For that reason, according to the report, potentially harmful medication errors may be three times more common in children than in adults.

An appropriate format or structure for a child's medicine is also important. Small children sometimes choke or asphyxiate while trying to swallow big tablets. For instance, earlier this year four children under 36 months died from choking on albendazole tablets during a de-worming campaign in Ethiopia.
In another example, side effects associated with antiretroviral medicines have been reported to occur in up to 30 per cent of HIV-infected children. Most of those side effects could be reversed by modifying the dosage or changing to an alternative medicine.

The study proposes that all countries establish national and regional monitoring systems for the detection of serious adverse reactions and medical errors in children. When such reporting systems exist, it is crucial that manufacturers follow up on adverse reactions to their products once they are on the market.

In addition, regulatory authorities need to make an effort to refine the science of clinical trials in children, create an active post-marketing surveillance programme and develop public databases of up to date information about efficacy and safety in paediatric medicines.

To assist countries, WHO will publish an official List of Essential Medicines for Children, continue to create awareness in countries and in the research community on the urgent need to monitor use of medicines in children, identify research gaps in children’s medicines, and create protocols to monitor adverse effects for child-specific medicine.

**Sudden expulsion of Iranian refugees from Turkey alarms UN agency**

21 September - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said today that it has raised serious concerns with the Turkish Government about its expulsion last month of five Iranians to northern Iraq.

UNHCR spokesperson Ron Redmond told reporters in Geneva that the agency had received confirmation that the five people were expelled on 22 August – even though they were recognized in Turkey by UNHCR under its mandate.

The Iranians were sent to the Iraqi city of Erbil, where they spent almost a month in detention. The refugees have just been released.

“UNHCR is concerned that no due process of law was followed prior to the expulsion and that UNHCR was not given any prior information of the authorities’ intention to expel these persons or of the expulsion itself,” Mr. Redmond said.

“To forcibly send persons to Iraq’s northern governorates if they do not originate from there is contrary to UNHCR’s guidelines. The security situation in northern Iraq, although relatively calm compared to the rest of Iraq, is still tense and unpredictable.”

Mr. Redmond added that unless sufficient safeguards are taken, the expulsion of refugees under the mandate of UNHCR may breach the principle of non-refoulement, which is enshrined in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Non-refoulement refers to the right of a refugee or asylum-seeker whose case has not yet been fully assessed to not be sent to a country where his or her life or liberty could be at risk.

**Gabon’s abolition of death penalty welcomed by UN human rights chief**

21 September - United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour today welcomed the decision by Gabon to abolish capital punishment and urged that the country swiftly enshrine the ban into law.

Gabon’s Council of Ministers voted last week to ban the death penalty in the African nation, where there has been a moratorium on executions since the early 1980s.

“This decision reinforces the growing movement towards the abolition of the death penalty worldwide,” Ms. Arbour said in a statement issued in Geneva.

She encouraged the Government to consider becoming a party to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant
on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on the abolition of the death penalty.

The High Commissioner also called on Gabon’s Ministers of Justice and of Human Rights, as well as its Parliament, to quickly take the steps necessary to including the ban in the penal code.

**Fighting in Colombia displaces more indigenous people, UN reports**

*21 September* - More than 1,000 indigenous Colombians have taken refuge in a school to escape fighting between the army and an irregular armed group, the latest victims of more than 40 years of conflict which has uprooted 3 million people and has recently had a disproportionate effect on the country’s original inhabitants, the United Nations reported today.

“Armed combat, presence of irregular groups, targeted killings and landmines all contribute to the rising trend of forced displacement,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesman Ron Redmond said of the latest incident involving 1,018 Awá in southern Colombia, almost half of them children under 16.

The local authorities have delivered food for the past three days, a doctor is on site and UNHCR has offered to meet the needs in water, sanitation and accommodation, Mr. Redmond told a news briefing in Geneva.

The area is part of the department of Nariño, which in recent years has suffered some of the worst violence in Colombia. Since the start of 2007, there have been 18 cases of mass displacement involving more than 50 people moving at one time within Nariño, forcing more than 10,000 people out of their homes.

The four decades of conflict between Government forces, leftist guerrillas, rightist paramilitaries and criminal gangs has not only affected the south of the Andean country. Over the past year the violence has also uprooted indigenous communities in north-western Chocó region near the border with Panama.

UNHCR has repeatedly warned that some indigenous communities, displaced from land to which they are tied by their culture and traditions, are in danger of disappearing altogether.

Under the UNGuiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the State has a special duty to prevent the forced displacement of indigenous people and others with a special relation to the land and Colombia’s Constitutional Court is holding a hearing today to seek more information from the Government on measures to protect indigenous people.

Indigenous representatives from all over Colombia, including the Awás, are to present the situation in each community, and at the Court’s invitation UNHCR will take part.

Last year, the Court found that there were “persistent gaps” in specific attention to the rights of indigenous people, which could put at risk the cultural survival of displaced communities.

There are 87 different indigenous groups in Colombia, making up 3 per cent of the population of 42 million. They comprise one of the richest and most varied indigenous heritages in the world.