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## UN human rights chief alarmed by 'major tragedy' in western China

**7 July** - The top United Nations human rights official today expressed her alarm at the high number of casualties sustained during this weekend's rioting in Urumqi, the capital of China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region, calling on all people to show restraint in the wake of the "major tragedy."

According to figures announced by the Government yesterday, over 150 people have been killed and 800 others injured during the clashes on Sunday.

"This is an extraordinarily high number of people to be killed and injured in less than a day of rioting," said Navi Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Although the exact circumstances that sparked the violence is not clear, longstanding tensions between the Uighur and Han Chinese ethnic groups is said to have played a major role. Reports indicate that Sunday's demonstration was caused by clashes between the two groups at a toy factory in Guandong Province late last month.

"I urge Uighur and Han civic leaders, and the Chinese authorities at all levels, to exercise great restraint so as not to spark further violence and loss of life," Ms. Pillay said.

She also underscored the need to maintain the right of demonstrators to exercise their freedom of expression peacefully.



UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay

"I fully recognize that the authorities have an essential duty to maintain public order," the High Commissioner said. "However, it is vital that the authorities only resort to lethal force when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life."

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said yesterday in Geneva that in all countries, differences of opinion must be resolved peacefully through dialogue. Governments concerned also must exercise extreme care and take necessary measures to protect the lives and safety of the civilian population, he said.

Furthermore, those arrested must also be treated properly, Ms. Pillay said today, adding that they "should be accorded due process that is fully in line with China's own laws and international human rights standards and norms."

She called for a transparent and independent investigation into the causes of the rioting and why it escalated. "Such a process is essential to create trust," she stressed. "Otherwise, there is a risk of a prolonged vicious circle of resentment, unrest and violent reaction and counter-reaction."

## UN to strengthen peacekeeping efforts amid rising demand, says Ban



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addresses the Institute of International and European Affairs at Dublin Castle, Ireland

**7 July** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today highlighted a new effort to strengthen United Nations peacekeeping at a time when the demand for the Organization's services is at an all-time high and the global economic crisis threatens to further limit its ability to respond effectively.

In an address at Ireland's Dublin Castle, Mr. Ban noted that the UN is the only body that can deploy comprehensive peace operations integrating military, police and civilian components.

There are currently 16 peacekeeping operations and 27 special political missions deployed around the globe, supported by 78,000 military personnel, more than 11,000 police and more than 23,000 civilian staff, he said.

At the same time, he noted that peacekeeping has experienced serious setbacks. "Today we face mounting difficulties in getting enough troops, the right equipment and adequate logistical support," he said. "Supply has not kept pace with demand."

He added that the global economic crisis could further limit the Organization's ability to respond effectively, and that a number of missions struggle to operate amidst stalled peace processes and ongoing violence.

"These gaps and constraints should concern all of us," he stated, noting that they have led the UN to undertake what it is calling a "new horizon" process for peacekeeping. "We want our efforts to be more cohesive. And we want a renewed consensus on the direction peacekeeping should take."

The UN Departments for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and for Field Support (DFS) have been working on the New Horizon initiative, which focuses on critical peacekeeping tasks and functions that require a renewed consensus; measures to improve mission design, resourcing and deployment; proposals on assessing and building the capacities needed for future peacekeeping; and a strategy to create a stronger, more flexible support system.

"The objective is to arrive at a set of achievable immediate-, medium- and long-term goals to help configure UN peacekeeping to better meet today's and tomorrow's challenges," UN peacekeeping chief Alain Le Roy said last week, as he outlined the initiative to the Security Council.

The Secretary-General, who is on his first official visit to Ireland, praised the country's "dynamic presence" at the UN, including its contributions to peacekeeping for more than half a century.

Today, there are nearly 500 Irish men and women serving with UN operations in the Middle East and Africa, he noted. In addition, 90 of the country's citizens have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving the world body.

Ireland has also participated in military and civilian missions of the European Union, which is present together with the UN in many situations to help maintain peace and security.

Mr. Ban said this kind of solidarity is more important than ever today amid multiple crises – food, fuel, flu and financial. “These are times of trial. We are living through an era like no other,” he stated.

The Secretary-General also met today with Irish President Mary McAleese and Prime Minister Brian Cowen, with whom he discussed Ireland's contributions to UN peacekeeping efforts, as well as development aid, the fight against hunger and public health.

In addition, he met with members of the Joint Foreign Affairs Committee of Parliament, stressing to them the important role played by parliamentarians in addressing some of today's toughest challenges.

“Through your legislative power, you can give domestic meaning to international standards and agreements. Through your power of the purse, you can put resources behind global causes. And through your deliberations, you can set an example of dialogue, democracy and the peaceful resolution of differences,” he stated.

After concluding his trip to Ireland, Mr. Ban will head to L'Aquila, Italy, to meet with leaders attending the summit of the Group of Eight (G8) industrialized nations.

## **Ban welcomes Russian-United States agreement to cut nuclear arsenals**

**7 July** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the accord between Russia and the United States that commits the two countries to significantly reduce their nuclear arsenals.

The Joint Understanding for a follow-on agreement to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), signed yesterday in Moscow by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and US President Barack Obama, commits the two States to cut their strategic warheads to between 1,500 and 1,675 and their strategic delivery vehicles to between 500 and 1,000.

“This agreement is consistent with the disarmament obligations by the two largest nuclear-weapon States under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT),” Mr. Ban said in a statement issued by his spokesperson.

“The Secretary-General believes that this agreement will make a significant contribution to the process of nuclear disarmament, as well as nuclear non-proliferation, during the lead-up to the 2010 NPT Conference and eventually to achieving the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.”

In May Mr. Ban told the Conference on Disarmament that he was encouraged by recent remarks by the leaders of both Russia and the US, and he urged the broader international community to undertake a new multilateral approach to ensure sustainable progress towards disarmament.



**Pressurized Water Reactors (PWRs) under construction at a nuclear power plant**

## Senior UN official nominated as Secretary-General's top envoy to Iraq

**7 July** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced today that he has chosen the second most senior official in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to be the UN's top envoy in Iraq.

Mr. Ban has informed the Security Council of his intention to appoint Ad Melkert, who has served as Associate Administrator of UNDP since 2006, to succeed Staffan de Mistura as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq and head of the UN mission in that country (UNAMI), UN spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters.



Ad Melkert

Ms. Montas said that Mr. Melkert, 53, brought a unique combination of political experience and economic and development expertise to the role from his work as a government minister and member of parliament in the Netherlands and as a senior official at UNDP and the World Bank.

“As a result, he enters with a deep understanding of the nature of the challenges and priorities that face Iraq at this phase of its transition,” she said.

Ms. Montas said Mr. Ban was also grateful to Mr. de Mistura for his “valuable leadership in a challenging security environment in Iraq.”

UNAMI is tasked with assisting in the reconstruction of Iraq, the implementation of the International Compact with Iraq and the process of national reconciliation and inclusive political dialogue.

## Mass arrests in Iran spark grave concerns from UN human rights experts

**7 July** - Six United Nations human rights experts today voiced grave concerns about the mass arrests and ill-treatment of opposition supporters, clerics, journalists, students and others in the weeks following last month's contested presidential elections in Iran.

The experts issued a joint statement calling on the Iranian Government to uphold its international obligations to ensure that all citizens' human rights are protected and to allow independent scrutiny of the current situation.



Iranian police on motorbikes patrol a street in Tehran

“The six experts reiterate their grave concern about reports of killings, ongoing arrests, use of excessive police force and the ill-treatment of detainees,” according to the statement, which was issued in Geneva.

Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly continue to be undermined and human rights defenders face an increasingly precarious situation, the experts said, despite previous warnings from senior UN rights officials about the possible use of excessive police force and violence used by some militia members during opposition protests in the wake of the election results.

At least 20 people have been killed and hundreds of others seriously injured in clashes with security forces since 12 June, the experts reported, and hundreds more people have been arrested after clashing with the police or the Basij militia.

“The experts recall that the use of force must be exercised with restraint and only once non-violent means have been exhausted,” the joint statement said. “In addition, the use of firearms by the security forces is prohibited, except in self-defence or defence of others from an imminent threat of death or serious injury.”

The statement questioned the legal basis for the arrests of journalists, human rights defenders, opposition supporters and demonstrators, saying it was unclear and therefore gave rise to fears of “arbitrary detentions of individuals legitimately exercising their right to freedom of expression, opinion and assembly.

“The majority of those arrested are reported being detained at Tehran’s Evin prison, where many are being held incommunicado without charge or access to legal representation or their families. The experts are concerned about the risk of enforced disappearances given that the whereabouts of many of those arrested remain unknown.”

The experts also voiced concern about interference with broadcasts and online coverage of protests, the expulsion of several foreign journalists and restrictions on the freedom of journalists to move and report freely, saying this had “stifled freedom of expression.”

The statement was issued by: Manuela Carmena Castrillo, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on arbitrary detention; Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Frank La Rue, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Manfred Nowak, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; Margaret Sekaggya, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; and Santiago Corcuera, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the working group on enforced and involuntary disappearances.

The experts serve in an independent and unpaid capacity and report to the UN Human Rights Council, which is based in Geneva.

## In Haiti, UN envoy Bill Clinton visits city devastated by hurricane



Former United States President and new UN Envoy to Haiti Bill Clinton

**7 July** - The United Nations Special Envoy to Haiti, the former United States president Bill Clinton, today visited the city of Gonaïves – which was devastated by floods last year – as part of his efforts to boost hurricane preparedness and job creation in the impoverished Caribbean nation.

During today’s stop in Gonaïves, Mr. Clinton, who was joined by Haitian President René Préval, focused on labour intensive rehabilitation schemes and providing basic services to communities in the Artibonite Valley.

They also visited a project to refurbish the La Quinte River, which flooded the city last year, as well as an emergency hospital that has temporarily replaced one destroyed by hurricanes.

The two men spoke with flood victims, who are weary of the 2009 hurricane season under way, UN spokesperson Michele Montas told reporters today.

Mr. Clinton, who recently took up his duties, met last night with both Mr. Préval and Prime Minister Pierre Louis, and will also visit a garbage recycling project that has created jobs in the disadvantaged suburb of Carrefour Feuilles in the capital, Port-au-Prince.

Later today, he is expected to meet with parliamentarians, while tomorrow he will hold talks with members of the private sector, international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society groups, including women’s groups.

During his three-day visit to Haiti, which began yesterday, the Special Envoy seeks to discuss how to support Government efforts to generate new jobs, brace the country for hurricanes and boost the delivery of basic social services.

Mr. Clinton “will also focus on how to ensure that the United Nations, civil society and the donor community align their activities with the Government’s recovery plan, as well as with each other,” Ms. Montas said.

“Haiti, notwithstanding the total devastation wreaked by the four storms last year, has the best chance to escape the darker aspects of its history in the 35 years that I have been going there,” the former US leader said at a press conference at UN Headquarters last month.

Mr. Clinton has already visited Haiti this year, but this will be his first trip to the impoverished State since his appointment as an envoy by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in May. In March, the two men visited Haiti together to assess the situation in the wake of four back-to-back tropical storms battered the country in 2008, killing nearly 800 people and affecting an estimated 1 million people.

## Eastern DR Congo still faces security, humanitarian challenges – Ban

**7 July** - The security and humanitarian situation in the far east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continues to crumble, despite the recent signing of a peace pact between the Government and a key militia, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon writes in a new report.

On 23 March, the Government and the National Congress for People’s Defence (CNDP), one of the main combatants in the fighting, signed a peace accord.

But the report made public today, which covers the period since the end of March, points to new challenges, “which further increase the fragility and volatility of the situation” in the area.

The obstacles include the capacity and conduct of the newly-integrated units of the DRC forces, known as FARDC, in North and South Kivu provinces, it said, with many troops being unpaid, poorly trained and badly equipped.

Command and control of FARDC units is also fragile, resulting in stepped up desertions, mutinies and “a surge in unacceptable abuses against the very populations that these forces are expected to protect,” Mr. Ban wrote.

There are some 1.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in eastern DRC, with 500,000 having been uprooted since this January due to clashes between the FARDC and the rebel Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda (FDLR).

But he pointed out that 350,000 displaced have been able to return to their homes in North Kivu.

Notwithstanding this positive development, the Secretary-General said that the human rights situation is still cause for grave concern.

Members of the FARDC and the Congolese National Police are responsible for rape and torture, among other abuses, while members of foreign armed groups such as the FDLR and the notorious Ugandan group known as the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) are responsible for massacres of civilians, sexual violence and arbitrary executions.

Another major obstacle continues to be addressing impunity, requiring the efforts of the highest levels of Government to bring those behind human rights and other abuses to justice, the report said.

To this end, the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC, known as MONUC, is creating an action plan to ensure that the Government agrees on a strategy to combat sexual violence.

Also made public today was a report by the Security Council mission which visited the African Union (AU) at its headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Rwanda, the DRC and Liberia from 14-21 April.

The Council called on the Governments in the region, especially the DRC and Rwanda, “to continue to build on the positive momentum created by their recent improved relations and to continue to take measures aimed at building confidence



Conflict, chronic poverty and high food prices threaten children’s well-being in the eastern DRC

between them and laying the foundations for sustainable regional cooperation.”

The body also welcomed the appointment of a Rwandan ambassador to the DRC, urging the DRC in turn to expedite its appointment of an ambassador to Rwanda.

On sexual and gender-based violence, the Government must take decisive action to address confirmed abuses by FARDC soldiers, the report said, including following on the list of five officers in commanding positions assessed to have carried out such crimes.

## Better water management key to tacking Afghan poverty, UN envoy says



Qargha Lake in Kabul, Afghanistan

**7 July** - The inefficient management of Afghanistan’s water resources is critical to both the country’s widespread poverty and deadly tribal conflicts over territory, a United Nations envoy said today, calling for better management to help foster stability and build prosperity.

Kai Eide, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative, told a conference on water resources development in Kabul that donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should focus more on enhancing the management of water resources.

“Whether we look at poverty, food security, health or economic development, there is no issue more important for this country at this time than the development of Afghanistan’s water resources,” he said.

Afghanistan’s economy remains dominated by agriculture, which employs two-thirds of the national workforce and accounts for more than half of gross domestic product (GDP). But decades of conflict and misrule have destroyed irrigation systems, stunting economic growth.

Mr. Eide said today that trans-boundary issues with other Central Asian countries should also be resolved.

“Afghanistan needs agreements with its neighbours that can provide equitable sharing and cooperative management of water resources in accordance with principles of international law,” he said.

“Afghanistan has a right to its share of its resources. Today they are unused. The United Nations is committed to helping to effectively manage the world’s trans-boundary waters and will continue to support such efforts.”

The Special Representative added that the predicted good harvest this year, following strong rainfall, should not detract from the need for sound water management policies.

Meanwhile, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) announced today that it is giving a grant of nearly \$24 million to back a rural microfinance and livestock support programme across Afghanistan.

The project, IFAD’s first major programme in the country, will focus some of the under-served segments of the rural population, including poor herders, smallholders, households headed by women and the nomadic Kuchis.

## Number of Somalis uprooted by violence in capital tops 200,000 – UN

**7 July** - More than 200,000 people have now been forced to flee the Somali capital Mogadishu since fighting broke out between the Government and opposition groups in early May, in the biggest exodus from the troubled city since Ethiopian forces intervened in the Horn of Africa nation in 2007, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said today.

By yesterday, the eight-week offensive led by the Al-Shabab and Hisb-ul-Islam militia against the Government had driven a “staggering” 204,000 people from the capital, agency spokesperson Ron Redmond said.



Thousands of Somali refugees, like these, continue to arrive in Kenya

“The escalating conflict in Mogadishu is having a devastating impact on the city’s population, causing enormous suffering and massive displacement,” he said.

UNHCR’s local partners have reported that clashes in the past week have claimed 105 lives and injured 382 people.

Neighbourhoods affected by the violence “have hitherto been islands of peace, escaping much of the conflict and destruction,” Mr. Redmond pointed out.

Many Mogadishu residents are fleeing their homes for the first time since the start of Somalia’s civil war in 1991.

Many of those uprooted by the current crisis fled to the Afgooye corridor, west of the capital and already home to 400,000 displaced people. The majority are now headed further afield to the Lower and Middle Shabelle, Galgaduud, Bay and Lower Juba regions.

The UNHCR spokesperson said that the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has climbed to 1.2 million, out of a total population of over 9 million.

Although the Somali-Kenyan border is officially closed, with Kenyan authorities not allowing asylum-seekers to cross, the number of people arriving at the UNHCR-run Dabaab refugee complex in Kenya – the world’s largest, hosting over 280,000 refugees – continues to rise.

Since May, over 11,000 Somalis have been registered at Dabaab, bringing the total that has arrived at the site since the start of the year to 36,000.

But UNHCR said that the number of Somali refugees arriving in Kenya is far higher, since many of them have made their way to urban centres such as Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa.

## Nepal: UN human rights official voices concern about promotion of army officer

**7 July** - The top United Nations human rights official in Nepal has raised concerns with the country's defence ministry about the proposed promotion of an army officer who commanded a battalion responsible for acts of torture, arbitrary detention and other human rights violations.

Richard Bennett, the Representative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), met yesterday with Nepal's Defence Minister Bidhya Bhandari to voice concern about the plan to promote Toran Jung Bahadur Singh from Major General to Lieutenant General.



Richard Bennett of the human rights office (OHCHR) in Nepal (file Photo)

OHCHR issued a report in 2006 on its investigation into torture, arbitrary detention and disappearances carried out at Maharajgunj Barracks, which was under the control of a battalion led by Maj.-Gen. Singh in 2003-04 during the conflict between Government forces and Maoists.

The report concluded that Maj.-Gen. Singh "knew or ought to have known about these actions" and recommended that "those potentially implicated directly or through command responsibility for units involved should be suspended from any official duties pending the investigation, and should not be proposed for participation in UN peacekeeping missions."

Mr. Bennett said that "given these serious and credible allegations, the Government should investigate General Singh's involvement before taking a decision on his promotion."

In a press release issued yesterday, OHCHR said it also acknowledged the contribution of Nepal on various UN peacekeeping missions, which obligate peacekeepers to maintain the highest standards of compliance with human rights.

## UN human rights probe into Gaza conflict wraps up public hearings in Geneva

**7 July** - The United Nations Human Rights Council's fact-finding probe into rights violations committed during the recent Gaza conflict heard from victims, witnesses and experts from southern Israel and the West Bank over two days of public hearings which wrapped up in Geneva today.

"The aim of holding these public hearings...was to show the human side of the suffering, to give a voice to the victims so that they are not lost among statistics," Justice Richard Goldstone, who leads the four-member mission, told journalists.



Palestinian children cower in fear during Israeli military offensive in Gaza

Mr. Goldstone said his team had listened to "moving stories" that were "very difficult to hear" concerning the impact of the fighting that took place between 27 December and 18 January, many from victims who had lost members of their families and their livelihoods.

"No written words can by themselves convey human stories the way people can do it in their own voice and words," he said.

With the conclusion of the hearings in Geneva, as well as those held last week in Gaza City, the mission is moving towards the end of its investigative phase, Mr. Goldstone said.

In addition to their investigations on the ground in Gaza, the team had also travelled to Amman, Jordan, to hear from Israelis and people from the West Bank. Mr. Goldstone said that he would be sending questions soon to authorities from Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, asking for input on areas where his team had been unable to gather sufficient information.

The mission's final report is due to be completed early next month and will be presented in September to the Human Rights Council.

## Unresolved issues hindering permanent peace between Israel and Lebanon – UN report

**7 July** - The cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon continues to hold but remains fragile owing to a number of unresolved issues, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says in a new report, calling for greater efforts to seek a permanent ceasefire between the two neighbours.

“Almost three years after resolution 1701 was adopted, it remains the best available blueprint for the parties to move from the current state of cessation of hostilities towards a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution,” Mr. Ban writes to the Security Council regarding implementation of the text which helped to end the 2006 conflict between Israel and Hizbollah.

The 2006 resolution called for renewed respect for the Blue Line separating the Lebanese forces and Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), the disarming of militias and an end to arms smuggling, among other measures.

Mr. Ban notes that a permanent ceasefire will only be achieved through the adoption of concrete measures on these and other issues he outlines in the report, which covers the period since his previous report of 3 March.

Among the progress made in recent months, the Secretary-General cites efforts by the parties, in cooperation with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), to visibly mark the Blue Line, as well as the handover by Israel of technical strike data on cluster bombs to UNIFIL.

At the same time, he voices concern at the allegations by Lebanon's Government that Israeli spy cells have been operating in Lebanon and that the IDF helped alleged spies to cross from Lebanon into Israel through the Blue Line.

If these allegations are proved to be true, he writes, they could endanger the fragile cessation of hostilities that exists.

Mr. Ban also expresses concern about the presence of armed groups in Lebanon operating outside the control of the State, which poses a challenge to the ability of the State to exercise full control over its territory.

“The United Nations continues to believe that the disarmament of all armed groups should take place through a Lebanese-led political process, so that there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than those authorized by the State,” he says.

Crucial to ensuring there is no flow of weapons to groups outside the control of the State, Mr. Ban points out, is for all Member States to respect the arms embargo imposed on Lebanon as part of resolution 1701, as well as for the Lebanese Government to secure control of its border with Syria.

Another concern mentioned in the report is the continued occupation by the IDF of the part of the village of Ghajar, and an adjacent area of land, that lies north of the Blue Line. Mr. Ban calls on Israel to complete its withdrawal from the area without delay, in accordance with its obligations under resolution 1701.

The Secretary-General also pledges to continue his diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the issue of the Shab'a Farms area, and encouraged Israel and Syria to submit their responses to the provisional definition of the area that he had provided.



UNIFIL troops at work observing Section 83 near the Blue Line on the border between Lebanon and Israel

## Ban pledges UN assistance in efforts to free abducted aid workers in Darfur

**7 July** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today that the United Nations would “spare no effort” in trying to help secure the release of two female aid workers who have been abducted in the Darfur region of western Sudan.

Unknown gunmen abducted Sharon Commins of Ireland and Uganda’s Hilda Kawuki, who both work for the non-governmental organization (NGO) known as GOAL, on the evening of 3 July from their office in the North Darfur town of Kutum. A Sudanese guard was also taken but later released.



Landscape of Darfur

Mr. Ban told journalists in Dublin, following talks with Irish Prime Minister (Taoiseach) Brian Cowen, that he was “sorry and concerned” about the abduction.

“I assure you that we will spare no effort in providing necessary support and cooperation – in terms of logistics, in terms of providing information, in terms of working together with the Sudanese Government... in trying to identify and locate and try to have a safe return of your nationals,” Mr. Ban said.

## Drug trafficking and violence threaten gains in West Africa – UN official



**7 July** - West Africa’s progress in consolidating stability and security is being jeopardized by coups and organized crime, the top United Nations envoy to the region warned today.

Said Djinnit, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative, told the Security Council that West Africa’s determination to “decisively” tackle its problems “have led to an important reduction in the scope and the level of violence across the sub-region.”

He pointed out that “there is currently no open armed conflict going on in West Africa.”

But he cautioned that the progress is fragile, as exemplified by last year’s coup d’état in Mauritania, the continued political and constitutional crisis in Niger and other obstacles – from terrorism to governance to the current global economic crisis.

Mr. Djinnit, briefing the Council on the Secretary-General’s most recent report on the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA), said the resurgence of unconstitutional or violent changes in government are “one of the most alarming threats to peace and stability in West Africa,” he said, adding that all recent unconstitutional government changes on the continent – with the exception of Madagascar – have occurred in West Africa.

He also cited drug trafficking as a key security challenge to the area, which has become a hub for cocaine trafficking between Latin America and Europe, with traffickers “taking advantage of the weaknesses of West African States, including porous borders, abundant unemployed youth, widespread corruption and poverty.”

Also addressing today’s open Council meeting, Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said that the volume of drugs passing through the region have dropped.

Some 20 tons of cocaine – worth \$1 billion – are still transiting through West Africa annually, and he warned that there is no guarantee the volumes will continue to fall. “Perhaps drug flows have only been temporarily disrupted as criminal groups lie low to minimize risk,” he said.

Recent turmoil in Guinea-Bissau and Guinea has demonstrated that “there are powerful forces with a stake in illicit

activity,” Mr. Costa told the 15-member body.

“Change, in the direction of more justice and transparency, is a threat to people with a vested interest in crime,” he said, calling for the reasons for the region’s vulnerability to be tackled to make it less attractive to traffickers.

But the UNODC chief emphasized that drugs are not the only goods being trafficked, with a new agency report showing that West Africa is also a hub for cigarettes, arms, counterfeit medicines and oil, among others.

“All this is in the hands of organized crime which is undermining the rule of law, governance, the environment, human rights and health,” he said, adding that trafficking threatens strides made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs],” eight anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline.

The UNODC report found that in some cases, the value of trafficked goods exceeds the gross domestic product (GDP) of West African nations, which are among the world’s poorest.

The revenue from 45 million counterfeit anti-malarial pills, worth nearly \$450 million, is greater than Guinea-Bissau’s GDP, while profits generated by cigarette smuggling, with a \$775 million price tag, surpasses the Gambia’s entire GDP.

Meanwhile, the income derived from illegally selling oil or trafficking cocaine, worth \$1 billion annually each, rivals the GDPs of Cape Verde and Sierra Leone, the report said.

## **No effort must be spared to aid displaced Pakistanis, says UN relief chief**

**7 July** - The top United Nations relief official kicked off a four-day visit to Pakistan today, urging that no effort be spared to tackle the humanitarian crisis involving over 2 million people uprooted by fighting between Government forces and militants in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

“While it is not the largest crisis in the world, needs in Pakistan are the most immediate of any crisis in the world. The upcoming monsoon season makes meeting those needs an even more urgent priority,” said Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes.



Internally displaced Pakistani women and girls queue for UNHCR relief items

“This will not be easy, and I fear it will be by no means perfect. But we must pull out all the stops to do as much as possible, as quickly as possible,” he added.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported today that preparations continue in the displacement camps for the upcoming monsoon season, which is expected to start in mid-July.

The agency’s spokesperson Ron Redmond told reporters in Geneva that, depending on the intensity of the monsoon, some families may have to be relocated to other areas less prone to flooding.

Some 260,000 of the more than 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) are in 21 camps, according to UNHCR. The vast majority of the displaced are outside the camps, living with host families and in school buildings.

During the course of his visit, the UN humanitarian chief plans to visit IDP camps, host families and spontaneous settlements where some of the displaced are taking shelter.

“Although we are making headway in delivering aid to people in formal camps, we need to find ways to reach more displaced in need – especially those staying in spontaneous settlements and with host families,” he said.

Mr. Holmes, who is also UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, began his visit today by meeting with Foreign Minister Shah

Mahmoud Qureshi and General Nadeem, head of the Special Support Group, as well as the humanitarian country team in Pakistan.

In a related development, UNHCR and the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) yesterday signed a partnership agreement to support vital humanitarian operations in Pakistan.

The agreement will procure relief items like tents and blankets, to meet the needs of IDPs, mainly women and children, as well as facilitate the voluntary return of displaced people in the country's north-west.

## Kosovars displaced by war face reintegration obstacles, says UN rights expert



Walter Kälin, the Secretary-General's Representative for the Human Rights of IDPs

**7 July** - More than one decade after the Balkan wars concluded, Kosovars uprooted by fighting then continue to face serious challenges in returning home and local integration, a United Nations human rights expert said today.

“All persons who were internally displaced from or within Kosovo have the right to return but are also entitled to integrate wherever they currently are,” said Walter Kälin, the Secretary-General's Representative on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs), after wrapping up a week-long trip which took him to Belgrade, Pristina and other cities.

His mission to the region, he stressed, was in line with Security Council resolution 1244, which reaffirms Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and also gave the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) administrative authority. Further, he underscored that any reference to Kosovo – whether to its territory, institutions or population – is to be understood to be in accordance with the UN's position of strict neutrality on its status.

While welcoming authorities' expressed commitment to help IDPs, regardless of their ethnicity, return, Mr. Kälin saw entrenched patterns of discrimination, lack of access to employment, few schools for minorities and difficulties in repossessing property, among other obstacles to return.

Nearly 800 IDP families have registered to return to or within Kosovo this year, marking “an important test case,” he said, with the programme's outcome showing whether authorities are willing to accept and facilitate returns.

Since his last visit to the then Serbia and Montenegro in 2005, he said that he has seen marked improvements in the local integration of the displaced.

For example, in a “positive” and “clear step forward,” the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees and others have helped IDPs leave “dreadful” collective centres and move into their own homes, the Representative said.

But he cautioned that bureaucratic barriers could impede the access of IDPs – the vast majority of whom are of Serb ethnicity – to public services.

“If you want to give internally displaced persons a realistic chance to return one day, you have to first allow them to re-establish a normal life,” he emphasized.

Mr. Kälin in also voiced his concern over the situation of IDPs of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian ethnicity, who have “been living on the margins of society even before they were displaced.”

Many of their children do not attend schools and they also cannot access housing, social and health state benefits because they lack recognized addresses, he said, calling on authorities to treat them as any other IDPs.

He said he was alarmed that hundreds of Roma IDPs are still living in Cesmin Lug Camp, where they had been placed by

the UN one decade ago, and the adjacent Osterode barracks in Mitrovica.

“These people live in the immediate vicinity of toxic waste that poisons their blood with lead,” especially the children, the expert said.

“This is a humanitarian emergency and a very serious human rights issue. The lives and health of these sick children must not be abused for political purposes.”

## Security Council extends terms of judges on UN war crimes tribunals



**7 July** - The Security Council today extended the terms of the judges serving on the United Nations war crimes tribunals set up to deal with the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, so they can complete remaining cases by the deadline set for the courts' work.

The Council, in two separate resolutions that were adopted unanimously, urged both tribunals “to take all possible measures to complete their work expeditiously,” and expressed its determination to support their efforts in this regard.

The so-called “completion strategy” of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which is based in The Hague, requires it to finish trials of first instance by 2009, and then start downsizing in 2010.

Among the decisions taken today, the Council extended the term of office of eight permanent judges at the ICTY and 10 ad litem, or temporary, judges until 31 December 2010, or until the completion of the cases to which they are assigned.

In addition, the Council decided, on the request of the President of the ICTY, that the Secretary-General may appoint additional temporary judges to complete existing trials or conduct additional trials.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which is based in the Tanzanian town of Arusha, is also aiming to finish first-instance trials by the end of 2009.

The Tribunal was created in November 1994 to prosecute people responsible for genocide and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in Rwanda that year. Some 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered, mostly by machete, in just 100 days.

The Council decided, among other matters, to extend the term of office of five permanent judges at the ICTR and 11 temporary judges until 31 December 2010, or until the completion of the cases to which they are assigned if sooner.

Reporting to the Council last month on their activities, officials from both tribunals stressed that the cooperation and assistance of Member States remains crucial if the courts are to successfully fulfil their mandates to bring those responsible for the most serious crimes to justice.

## UN agencies urge action by G8 leaders to support world's hungry

**7 July** - Two United Nations agencies have called on the leaders attending this week's meeting of the Group of Eight (G8) industrialized nations not to forget the needs of the world's hungry, whose number is expected to top 1 billion this year, and to take action to ensure food security.

Hunger is among the issues on the agenda of the G8 summit in L'Aquila, Italy, which comes just two weeks after the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced that there are now more hungry people in the world than ever before.

According to FAO, the most recent increase in hunger is not the consequence of poor global harvests but is caused by the world economic crisis that has resulted in lower incomes and increased unemployment. This has reduced access to food by the poor, it said.

"The incidence of both lower incomes due to the economic crisis and persisting high food prices has proved to be a devastating combination for the world's most vulnerable populations," the agency stated in a background paper prepared for the summit, scheduled for 8 to 10 July.

Meanwhile, the head of the World Food Programme (WFP) is urging G8 leaders to boost long-term agricultural production while continuing to support immediate hunger assistance.

"We learned a lesson last year when rising food prices caused an epidemic of hunger leading to food riots in more than 30 countries. Without food people revolt, migrate or die. None of these are acceptable options," said Executive Director Josette Sheeran.

The Rome-based agency said that global food aid supplies last year were at a 34-year low, and food aid has dropped 35 per cent since 1995.

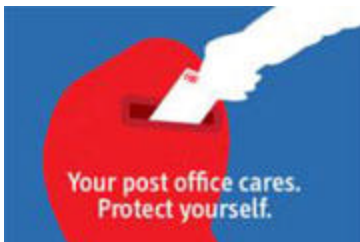
"We cannot afford to lose a generation to malnutrition, starvation and despair," said Ms. Sheeran. "Addressing immediate hunger needs is a critical long-term investment in healthy, stable societies."

She added that it is a "false logic" for the world to say that it will either invest in tomorrow's agriculture or today's urgent food needs. "There is no question that we must do both," she stated.



The World Food Programme (WFP) donates High Energy Biscuits

## UN uses post office network to raise awareness about HIV prevention



**7 July** - United Nations agencies plan to use hundreds of thousands of post offices around the world as part of a new campaign to raise awareness about HIV prevention at a time when more than 7,400 new infections occur every day.

Posters, campaign hand-outs and other materials will be made available to customers and employees of post offices in the hope that the postal network's broad reach will ensure the message penetrates all age groups.

The Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the UNI Global Union announced today that the campaign will be launched initially in 16,000 post offices in seven countries – Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, China, Estonia, Mali and Nigeria.

The campaign – which will also direct users to a multilingual website with detailed information on HIV prevention – will then be expanded over the next three years, potentially reaching 600,000 post offices around the world and an estimated 5.5 million postal employees.

The campaign will culminate with UPU calling on member countries to issue postage stamps about HIV/AIDS in 2011, 30 years after the disease was discovered.

UPU Director General Edouard Dayan said in a press release that the post office network was a natural partner for such an awareness programme given the vast number of post offices.

“The campaign is a strong example of what one industry can do to help achieve the important Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV by 2015,” Mr. Dayan said.

Michel Sidibé, the Executive Director of UNAIDS, said the high rate of new infections each day means HIV prevention efforts must be stepped up.

“The postal network has an extremely wide outreach: it is open to everyone from the young to the old and is an excellent and innovative way to raise awareness about how to prevent HIV,” he said.

In one of the seven pioneer countries, Cameroon, the country’s postal operator has never participated in a health awareness campaign before. About 5 per cent of Cameroonians aged between 15 and 49 have HIV.

“Raising awareness on HIV is crucial,” said Abraham Sizimboue, the acting Director General of Campost. “HIV touches the lives of a very large part of our population so we are very pleased to be running such an important campaign in our post offices here.”

## UN envoy holds talks with former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on name issue

**7 July** - The United Nations envoy tasked with mediating talks between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the dispute over the latter’s name is in the region for discussions with representatives of both countries.

Matthew Nimetz, the Secretary-General’s Personal Envoy for the talks, held talks over the past two days in Skopje with senior officials from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, including Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, President Gjorge Ivanov and Foreign Minister Antonio Milošoski.



Personal Envoy Matthew Nimetz

Mr. Nimetz – who is heading to Athens for several days of talks with senior Greek officials – said the meetings were constructive and he had presented Skopje with some changes to the proposals he submitted to both parties last October.

He voiced hope that these changes will lead to a positive reaction and accelerated negotiations, and noted that the leaders in Skopje had assured him they were eager to move forward.

The Envoy had previously proposed several alternatives, but the two Governments have remained far apart on reaching a satisfactory compromise name for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The Interim Accord of 13 September 1995, which was brokered by the UN, details the difference between the two countries on the issue. It also obliges the two sides to continue negotiations under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General to try to reach agreement.