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Russia vetoes extension of UN mission in Georgia



Security Council in session

15 June - The Security Council failed today to extend the presence of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) after Russia vetoed a technical roll-over for the nearly 16-year-old operation.

China, Libya, Uganda and Viet Nam abstained on the vote on the text, which would have extended the Mission – entrusted with overseeing the ceasefire accord between the Government and Abkhaz separatists in the country’s north-western region – for two more weeks, until 30 June. Its mandate expires at midnight Monday.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will instruct his Special Representative to take all measures required to cease UNOMIG’s operations, effective 16 June, and consult with his advisors on the immediate next steps, according to a statement issued by his spokesperson.

“The Secretary-General regrets that the Security Council has been unable to reach agreement on the basis of a package of practical and realistic proposals he submitted to the Security Council aimed at contributing to a stabilization of the situation on the ground,” the statement said.

Explaining Russia’s negative vote, Ambassador Vitaly Churkin noted that UNOMIG’s mandate had already been rolled over twice for four-month periods, in October 2008 and more recently in February 2009.

“There’s no sense in extending it since it’s built on old realities,” said Mr. Churkin, adding that the current reality calls for a



new security regime on the ground.

“Developing a new UN mission mandate would have allowed us to quickly put in place practical cooperation of all interested parties to strengthen security and to restore trust... However, our Western partners did not accept this approach.”

The draft resolution put forward in the Council was “clearly unacceptable,” he stated.

In his recent report to the Council, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated that the Mission has contributed to the overall security of the local population, while cautioning that an agreement on a revised security regime is needed for lasting stability.

UNOMIG’s area of responsibility in Abkhazia consists of a security zone, where no military presence is permitted; a restricted weapons zone, where no heavy weapons can be introduced; and the Kodori Valley.

It has no jurisdiction in nearby South Ossetia, the scene of fighting last August which pitted Georgia against separatists and their Russian allies.

Ban keeping close eye on developments in post-election Iran

15 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today he is keeping an eye on the situation in Iran, where President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s victory over opposition candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi in last week’s election is being contested.

“I have been closely following the situation, particularly right after the election, on the demonstrations and controversies,” Mr. Ban told reporters in New York. “At the same time, I have also taken note of the instruction by the religious leaders that there should be an investigation into this issue.



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

“In any country, when there is an election, the genuine will of the people should be reflected and respected in a most transparent and fair and objective manner,” he added.

According to media reports, hundreds of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets in the past several hours following the announcement of the election results. Mr. Mousavi has said he believes the vote was fixed in favour of President Ahmadinejad, while the incumbent said the vote was fair.

Meanwhile, the head of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) today urged the Government of Iran to allow better monitoring of its disputed nuclear programme, and to accept a new initiative of the United States to engage in direct dialogue.

Iran’s nuclear programme – which its officials have stated is for peaceful purposes, but some other countries contend is driven by military ambitions – has been a matter of international concern since the discovery in 2003 that the country had concealed its nuclear activities for 18 years in breach of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

In a speech to the Agency’s Board of Governors in Vienna, Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei said that Iran has not implemented any of the measures called for by the Security Council and by the Board.

“And there has been no movement by Iran on outstanding issues which need to be clarified to exclude the possibility of military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme,” he added.

“Without implementation by Iran of the additional protocol and the required safeguards measures, as well as the clarification of outstanding issues, the Agency will not be able to provide assurances about the absence of undeclared nuclear activities in Iran.”

At the same time, Mr. ElBaradei said he is encouraged by the new initiative of the US to engage Iran in direct dialogue,

without preconditions and on the basis of mutual respect. “This gives reason for hope that a genuine dialogue may lead to a comprehensive settlement of many security, political and economic issues spanning over 50 years.”

In a related development, the head of the Security Council committee monitoring sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme today updated the 15-member body on the panel’s latest work, including the efforts of States to implement those measures.

Ambassador Yukio Takasu of Japan presented the report, which covers the period 11 March to 15 June, of the committee established by resolution 1737 of December 2006, which banned trade with Iran in all items, materials, equipment, goods and technology which could contribute to the country’s enrichment-related, reprocessing or heavy water-related activities, or to the development of nuclear-weapon delivery systems.

Haiti has best chance in decades for development – UN envoy Bill Clinton



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

15 June - The new United Nations envoy on Haiti, Bill Clinton, today laid out his vision to advance development in the small and impoverished Caribbean nation, stressing that, more than ever before, the country has the opportunity to advance.

“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,” Mr. Clinton told a news conference at UN Headquarters in New York.

Mr. Clinton joined forces with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to help Haiti when they visited the country in March to raise awareness of efforts to help its people and Government bolster their economic security.

“No one is better placed for this mission,” Mr. Ban, who appointed the former United States president to the UN post last month, told reporters. “He knows the country. He loves the people. They love him. This is the strong wish of the Haitian people and the Haitian Government and myself as Secretary-General.”

Mr. Ban stressed that Haiti is at a “turning point,” adding that it has a real chance for stability and potential prosperity.

Mr. Clinton said that what he wanted to do first is to follow the plan Haiti has set out for its recovery and its future. “All I want to do is help the Haitians take over control of their own destiny. It’s all I have ever wanted for Haiti.”

This involves several elements, the first of which is to support the Government in the implementation of its programme “Haiti: a new paradigm,” to generate new jobs and enhance the delivery of basic services.

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, with an annual estimated gross domestic product (per capita) of \$390. In addition, 78 per cent of Haitians live on less than \$2 per day and 54 per cent on less than \$1 per day.

Mr. Clinton, who previously served as the UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery after the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake, said another important element is to assist the recovery effort in Haiti with the same fervour that was brought to the tsunami nations to ‘build back better.’

It is also vital to focus on disaster prevention and mitigation, he added.

“We know from experience in other places we can do a lot to mitigate disasters and we can do a lot in Haiti. We’re about to face another storm season without that kind of mitigation and I don’t want to go another year without it.”

The new envoy also plans to encourage more private sector investment in Haiti, and to make Haiti more competitive to attract such investment.

He also wants to encourage donors to honour the commitments they have already made at a pledging conference in Washington, D.C. in April. "We also want to do everything we can to make sure that these donor commitments are aligned as closely as possible with the Haitian programme we have been given."

Mr. Clinton said another area he will focus on is dealing with the energy crisis and accelerating what is being done in the area of clean energy.

"We believe there's a lot of economically viable opportunity yet untapped for clean energy and also for energy efficiency, particularly in manufacturing facilities and in the way the homes, and the schools and the hospitals and the public buildings that have to be rebuilt are rebuilt.

"I hope that in the process of doing all this, we will continue to elevate awareness of both the pain and the promise of Haiti in the international community, and there are real genuine economic opportunities there," he stated.

Head of UN agency calls for 'fairness' in global health policies



WHO chief Margaret Chan and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) at media briefing

15 June - The head of the United Nations public health arm today urged senior government officials to place "fairness" at the core of decisions to protect the most vulnerable against major worldwide crises.

Global warming, hikes in fuel and food prices, the economic meltdown and now the A(H1N1) influenza pandemic hit hardest in developing countries, said World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Margaret Chan.

There is growing recognition that "blind faith in economic growth and gain as the be-all, end-all, cure-for-all has been misplaced," Dr. Chan told senior government officials and international experts attending the Secretary-General's Forum on Advancing Global Health.

"Fairness, I believe, is at the heart of our ambitions in global health," said Dr. Chan. A failure to put equality at the centre of health-care policy decisions is "one reason why the world is in such a great big mess."

She characterized globalization as a rising tide that lifts "the big boats, but swamps or sinks many smaller ones," adding that the financial crisis has "proved highly contagious and this contagion showed no mercy and made no exceptions on the basis of fair play."

Even the level of preparedness for and capacity to cope with the A(H1N1) influenza outbreak in recent months are strongly biased towards wealthy countries, Dr. Chan told the gathering at UN Headquarters in New York.

"Differences in income, life expectancy, and opportunities are greater now than at any time in recent history. These extremes of privilege and misery," Chan noted, are often "a precursor for social breakdown."

After addressing the Forum, she told reporters that "health investment will bring economic progress and more wealth."

In his opening address to the Forum, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that healthy people have improved life expectancy, go to school, are more productive, take fewer days off work, have lower birth rates and thus invest more in fewer children.

"Health is the tie that binds all the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] together," he said, referring to the globally agreed anti-poverty targets with a 2015 deadline.

Eradicating poverty, illiteracy and the other challenges the MDGs seek to tackle will not be met without reaching the health targets, said Mr. Ban. "That is why global health is a top priority for me."

Underscoring the need for strengthening efforts to improve maternal health, with an estimated global loss of \$15 billion in

productivity due to maternal and newborn deaths, Mr. Ban said that there is “no better investment than safe-guarding the lives of mothers.”

He added that the international community should apply its experience of fighting AIDS and malaria to saving mothers’ lives. “We know that when governments, UN entities, businesses and civil society leaders join forces, we can have a powerful impact.”

Meanwhile, Deputy Secretary-General Asha Rose Migiro told a gathering launching the 2009 Report of the Global Campaign for the Health MDGs that in too many parts of the world, when a “woman goes into labour, relatives and friends do not go so far as to say goodbye, but they are often thinking, is this the last time they will see her?”

Highlighting the role women play at the “economic heart of the developing world,” Ms. Migiro noted that women in “Africa carry on their heads, or in their arms, two thirds of all the goods transported around the continent.”

She added that women also produce 80 per cent of Africa’s food and grow 90 per cent of the rice in Southeast Asia. “And because they are raising children – all across the world – women are also the key to a sustainable future.”

However, she said that some 1,400 women die each day in childbirth in the developing world and stressed that almost all of these deaths could be prevented.

“Globally, we need an estimated one million extra health care workers to provide the services needed to reduce maternal and child mortality,” a goal that sounds daunting, but achievable if the world “pulls together,” said Ms. Migiro.

Ban expresses unease over mounting tension between Chad, Sudan



Landscape of Darfur

15 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has voiced concern over the deterioration in relations between Chad and Sudan, further destabilizing the already volatile Darfur region.

Despite the agreement signed by the two countries in early May, Mr. Ban said that the previous two months in Darfur were characterized by an escalation of violence along the border with Chad, and an incursion by Chadian national forces into the area.

“This escalation of violence is particularly troubling as it followed the renewed commitments by both States to seek dialogue and re-establish diplomatic ties,” he wrote in his latest report on the joint UN-African Union operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

Underscoring that peaceful relations between Chad and the Sudan are a prerequisite to peace in Darfur, the Secretary-General urged both Governments to refrain from any act that may lead to heightened tensions and to meet the commitments made in the Doha Agreement on 3 May 2009 and the Dakar Agreement on 13 March 2008.

Mr. Ban also condemned the armed clashes which erupted in North Darfur during the reporting period, initiated by elements of the rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) against the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi (SLA/MM), a pro-Government faction, supported by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).

A 24 May attack on the SAF Umm Baru camp left at least 53 people seriously injured needing evacuation for medical treatment, and around 350 civilians – mainly women, children and the elderly – and 100 unarmed Sudanese soldiers and members of the SLA/MM took refuge at the base near the scene of the violence.

Reviewing UNAMID’s operations for the months of March and April in a region where more than six years of fighting between the Government, allied militia and rebel groups have led to over 300,000 deaths and uprooted over 2.7 million people, Mr. Ban puts the mission’s current deployment at some 13,455 out of a total authorized strength of 19,555, or at 68 per cent.

He stated that the “continued lack of key military enabling units,” such as 18 medium utility helicopters, as well as transport and aerial reconnaissance units, continue to be a concern.

Mr. Ban noted that although the immediate impact of expulsion of over a dozen humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from Sudan had been somewhat mitigated, he was concerned that pre-expulsion levels of aid delivery had not been restored.

On 4 March, Khartoum kicked out 13 international NGOs and revoked the permits of three local groups providing emergency relief assistance in Darfur after the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the region.

Mr. Ban noted the voluntary appearance of Bahr Idriss Abu Garda, commander of the United Resistance Front in Darfur, before the ICC in mid-May, in response to charges of war crimes committed in 2007 against the AU mission in the Sudan, and commended the Court for ensuring accountability for crimes against peacekeepers.

The need to find a viable political solution to Darfur has never been more urgent, he said with the Sudan-wide elections slated for February 2010, and the challenge of ensuring meaningful representation of all Sudanese in the electoral process.

However, the main parties “continue to choose violence over compromise and have demonstrated an overall lack of will or capacity to resolve this conflict alone,” said Mr. Ban.

UN human rights chief appeals for cooperation in Gaza probe



Boy flees an explosion in the Gaza Strip
[File Photo]

15 June - The top United Nations human rights official today called for an end to the Israeli blockade of Gaza and cooperation with an investigation mandated by the Human Rights Council of the recent conflict there.

High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay told the Geneva-based Council in Geneva that the ongoing heavy import restrictions and near total prohibition of exports have negative cumulative effects on the realization of a wide range of economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights, of the Gaza population.

“Gazans’ rights continue to be severely undermined or violated,” she stated. “These crippling conditions must be eased. Ultimately, the blockade and other restrictions that violate human rights must be lifted.”

Ms. Pillay said that reports of human rights violations by both sides “must be investigated by credible, independent and transparent accountability mechanisms, respectful of international standards of due process.

“All parties concerned, as well as States and the international community as a whole, should extend full support and cooperation to all such accountability efforts,” she said. “In particular, I stress the need for full cooperation with, unimpeded access to, and support of, the ongoing work of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission mandated by the Human Rights Council and headed by Justice Richard Goldstone.”

The Council appointed Mr. Goldstone to lead an independent team of investigators to study the allegations of human rights violations in the fighting between 27 December and 18 January. The team visited Gaza from 1 to 5 June, entering through Egypt after having been denied access through Israel.

The President of the Council, Martin Ihoeghian Uhomobhi, today said that the team members “have not lost hope of visiting areas of southern Israel and the West Bank, although this has not yet been possible as they have not received a positive response from the Government of Israel to repeated requests for cooperation.”

Employment recovery depends on leadership, UN labour chief tells jobs summit



15 June - The head of the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO) told a global jobs summit in Geneva that leadership is crucial for rapid recovery of employment amid the ongoing economic downturn.

“The call of today is for leadership. Leadership at all levels,” ILO Director-General Juan Somavia said as the three-day forum, which includes the participation of nine heads of State and dozens of ministers, got underway.

“We are clear about the challenges we face,” he said. “The world cannot afford to wait for employment to come back, several years after economic growth has returned.

“Rapid recovery of employment and the accompanying social protection needs must be central to public policy and business decisions,” Mr. Somavia said. “At the same time, we need to build an efficient social market economy that will prevent relapsing into the excesses and inequalities of the past.

“And we must be attentive because we can already sense certain interests that just can't wait to go back to business as usual,” he said.

The ILO chief said the goal was known: “A world economy that works for all, delivers on decent work for women and men, social justice at home and a fair globalization in the world.”

What was needed to achieve the goal, he said, was, “leadership with a moral compass guiding action. Leadership that dares take new approaches; leadership to fix what has gone wrong; leadership that listens and opens doors; leadership to find common ground in a world of nations moulded in different cultures and realities; leadership that can deliver the national and international agreements that put people first.”

He also called for international cooperation in trade, finance, development, environment, climate change, labour markets, decent work agreements, basic needs, food security, health and education.

“This summit can mobilize the leadership to overcome this crisis and chart a new course for a fair globalization bringing opportunities of decent work to all,” he said. “I am confident that the governments, employers and workers assembled here will return home energized by this conference, carrying with them the messages and solutions crafted here.”

This year's ILO annual Conference, from 3-19 June, is debating how to protect workers, families and enterprises from the turmoil and how to promote speedy economic and employment recovery.

According to the agency, during the 2007-2009 period, between 210 million and 239 million persons would be unemployed, representing global unemployment rates of 6.5 and 7.4 per cent respectively, or increases of between 39 and 59 million unemployed people since 2007.

ILO projections indicate that 200 million workers are at risk of joining the ranks of people living on less than \$2 per day between 2007 and 2009.

The summit, combined with the ILO's annual conference, is the largest forum in the agency's history. Among those participating are the leaders of Brazil, France, Togo, Mozambique, Finland, Argentina, Burkina Faso, Jamaica and Poland.

Better observed and enforced traffic laws vital to saving lives – UN agency

15 June - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) today called for stricter rules on traffic safety, and enforcement of the ones already on the books, to reduce the number of road accidents that kill more than a million people a year.

WHO released a “Global Status Report on Road Safety” assessing some 178 countries on implementation of road safety measures, including limiting speed, reducing drunk driving, and use of seatbelts, child restraints and motorcycle helmets.



Road traffic in Nepal

The study found that about half of the 1.27 million people killed in traffic accidents every year are not in cars, but are pedestrians, motorcyclists and cyclists. In addition, only 57 per cent of countries have laws that require all car occupants to wear seat-belts, and less than one third meet basic criteria for reducing speed in urban areas.

Among the other findings are that 50 per cent of countries do not have laws requiring the use of child restraints. Also, while helmet laws exist in more than 90 per cent of countries, only 40 per cent have a law that covers both riders and passengers while also requiring that helmets meet a specified standard.

WHO said that in countries where good traffic laws are on the books, “they are often inadequately enforced,” particularly in low-income countries.

“We found that in many countries, the laws necessary to protect people are either not in place or are not comprehensive. And even when there is adequate legislation, most countries report that their enforcement is low,” said WHO Director-General Margaret Chan.

“We are not giving sufficient attention to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists many of whom end up in clinics and hospitals. We must do better if we are to halt or reverse the rise in road traffic injuries, disability and deaths.”

WHO said more than 90 per cent of the world’s road deaths occur in low-income and middle-income countries, while these countries only have 48 per cent of the world’s vehicles.

Ban notes urgency of entry into force of nuclear-test-ban treaty



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

15 June - Noting that the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) has still not been brought into force over a decade after it was agreed, Secretary-General today renewed his appeal to all States that have not yet done so to adhere to the pact.

The General Assembly adopted the CTBT in September 1996 to ban any nuclear-test explosions anywhere. It will enter into force 180 days after all 44 of the States mentioned in Annex 2 of the Treaty – those that possessed nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons technology at the time of the opening for signature in 1996 – have ratified it.

The conclusion of the Treaty was “an important milestone in norm-setting and marked a significant achievement in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation,” Mr. Ban said in a statement issued today in New York.

“But for too long, it has not been brought into force,” he added. “The price is high. There is no doubt that the longer the Treaty is delayed, the greater the risks and consequences that nuclear weapons will again be tested.

“By outlawing all nuclear tests, the CTBT in force would greatly contribute to global efforts to curb the proliferation of

nuclear weapons while advancing nuclear disarmament,” he stated.

The Secretary-General last week welcomed the Security Council’s toughening of sanctions on the Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK), following the country’s latest nuclear test.

He said the test “reminded the international community of the urgency of bringing the Treaty into force without further delay.”

Stressing that the international community should “seize the current moment,” he particularly commended the new United States Administration for its pledges to work toward ratification of the Treaty.

Top UN official surveys UN-supported voter registration in DR Congo

15 June - The head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) continued her inaugural visit to Africa with a stop at a voter registration centre in the Democratic Republic of Congo and a meeting with the country’s leader, the agency said today.

UNDP Administrator Helen Clark arrived in Kinshasa, where she met with President Joseph Kabila, from Liberia and will continue her tour with a stop in Ethiopia.

UNDP is helping to support the Congolese Government’s election programme which began last week with voter registration in the capital.

More than six million new voters are expected to register using 6,000 portable registration kits that include a laptop to enter the data, a webcam, a fingerprint scanner, a printer and a generator.

Miss Clark watched as citizens were able to get registration cards on the spot.

“I was very impressed by the sophistication of the operation,” Miss Clark said.

The legislative elections are scheduled for July of 2011, and the presidential vote is slated for that October.

Food security major challenge for world’s poorest, Ban tells US students

15 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told a gathering at an American university that the daily reality for one third of the world’s population who live on less than \$2 a day include decisions such as which of their children gets to eat.

“No one should face such choices. No one should face such privation, not in a world of such wealth,” Mr. Ban said in a wide-ranging speech at St. Louis University in Missouri last Friday.

Mr. Ban noted that one billion people around the world, known as the “bottom billion,” live on less than \$1 a day and two billion live on less than \$2 a day, and many if not most are children suffering from hunger and malnutrition.

“Imagine the price of food shooting upward, as it has done and is still doing,” said Mr. Ban. “Last year, the prices of staple foods nearly doubled in the space of a few months.”

He stressed that for the bottom billion – who already spend two-thirds of their income on food – that was a “tough blow.”



Counting Votes in the 2006 elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Elections (file)



Some families ended up eating one meal a day instead of two, explained Mr. Ban, with some family members going without food. “Sometimes parents have to choose among their children as to who gets to eat, and who doesn’t.”

The Secretary-General said that children stop growing when they don’t eat and become too hungry to learn. “When older, they are too weak or undereducated to work to their full potential,” he added, and “whole societies become weak.”

He pointed out that families who spend more on food have less for health and education, beginning a social spiral which the whole society goes down.

“It is good that the UN’s World Food Programme [WFP] enjoys excellent ties with the United States and its farmers,” said Mr. Ban. “It is impossible to think we can succeed without the support of the United States.”

The challenge of food security must be addressed immediately, said Mr. Ban. “We need to strengthen agricultural infrastructure, increase productivity and do away with unfair terms of trade.”

The visit to St. Louis was part of the Secretary-General’s campaign to promote understanding of the UN and its pursuit of peace, security, development and human rights, which has taken him to a number of US cities, including Jackson Hole, Chicago and Atlanta.

Ban calls on Liberia’s partners to ‘stay the course’



15 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on Liberia’s partners to continue support to the West African country, which, six years after the end of conflict, remains fragile but has the potential to be a beacon on stability in the region.

“Once the epicentre of conflict, Liberia now has the potential to become a pillar of peace and stability in a troubled region,” Mr. Ban said in his latest report to the Security Council on the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

“At the same time, the complex nature and magnitude of the challenges inherited from the civil war and the dysfunctional pre-war State continue to pose serious difficulties for building essential national institutions, particularly in the security and rule-of-law sectors, requiring a sustained, long-term effort.

“Although it has been six years since the war ended, Liberia is still a fragile State,” he said. “I therefore call on all international partners to stay the course in Liberia, to help further consolidate the fragile peace and establish conditions for lasting stability.”

He said he was “deeply concerned” at the challenges facing efforts to develop a professional national police force, and asked for international partners to help in developing the strategic plan for such a force. He coupled the strengthening of the police force with the development of “functioning judicial and corrections systems.”

“The government and its partners should therefore invest more resources in reforming and developing the justice system, expanding its accessibility the population and ridding it of corruption and archaic and discriminatory, laws,” he said.

In addition, he proposed that the Council authorize the continuation of UNMIL’s troop strength of nearly 8,000 until after the 2011 elections and that the Mission continue to “include the conduct of free and fair elections on the list of core benchmarks” for an eventual drawdown.

“Security conditions permitting, the UNMIL drawdown would resume at an accelerated pace during the post-election period,” he said.

Secretary-General appeals for continued support for UN's Kosovo mission

15 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appealed for cooperation and constructive engagement from all concerned for a reconfigured United Nations mission in Kosovo, which he says is continuing to play an important role amid the changing reality on the ground following Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia last year.

While the world body has remained neutral on the question of the status of Kosovo, the UN Interim Administration Mission there (UNMIK) – which took over in 1999 after NATO forces drove out Yugoslav troops amid deadly fighting with the majority ethnic Albanian population – has been undergoing a process of restructuring to adapt to the prevailing situation.



UNMIK Headquarters in Pristina

The reconfiguration plan includes an enhanced operational role for the European Union in the area of rule of law under a UN “umbrella” headed by the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and in line with the 1999 Security Council resolution (1244) that established the mission.

A reconfigured UNMIK would continue to carry out many functions, including those related to a dialogue with Serbia on provisions in six areas: police, courts, customs, transport and infrastructure, boundaries and Serbian patrimony.

“UNMIK, as reconfigured, can continue to play an effective and useful role in mediating between communities, in promoting practical arrangements that can benefit both Pristina and Belgrade, and in carrying out the functions set out in my reports of 12 June and 24 November 2008,” Mr. Ban wrote in a report to the Security Council, referring to the details of the restructuring that he put forth last year.

“However, in order to do so effectively, UNMIK requires the cooperation and constructive engagement of all concerned,” he added. “The continuing support of the Security Council and of the broader international community for a reconfigured UNMIK is of crucial importance.”

He commended in particular the Mission’s efforts to mediate between communities amid recent tensions in northern Mitrovica, and welcomed the positive outcomes reached through the coordinated efforts of UNMIK, the EU rule of law mission (EULEX) and the NATO-led international force (KFOR).

The Secretary-General welcomed the assumption of full operational capability by EULEX, noting that its operational role in the rule of law sector, under the overall authority and within the status-neutral framework of the UN, is key to the maintenance of stability on the ground.

“As EULEX develops its road map for the strengthening of the rule of law throughout Kosovo, the concerns of all communities should continue to be taken fully into account, in close consultation with UNMIK,” he said.

Mr. Ban also noted that Kosovo authorities continued to act on the basis of the ‘Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo’ and made a series of public statements requesting UNMIK to conclude its mission, “asserting that Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) is no longer relevant and that they had no legal obligation to abide by it.”

In addition, although the Kosovo authorities maintained minimal contact with his Special Representative, Lamberto Zannier, during the reporting period from 10 March to 31 May, there continued to be “practical cooperation” between UNMIK representatives and Kosovo officials.

“My Special Representative and international stakeholders encouraged Pristina to take a more constructive stance towards engagement with UNMIK,” Mr. Ban stated.

Buenos Aires chosen by UN cultural agency as World Book Capital for 2011



15 June - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has chosen Buenos Aires as the 2011 World Book Capital as part of the agency's ongoing efforts to promote literature and reading.

The Argentinean capital was picked "for the quality and variety of its proposed programme as well as for the consolidated strategy on which it is based," the selection committee said after meeting on Friday at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

Every year, the committee designates a city for the title for the 12 months between World Book and Copyright Days on 23 April.

Buenos Aires becomes the eleventh city honoured over the years for the World Book Capital by a selection committee, composed of the three main professional associations in the book industry – the International Publishers Association, the International Booksellers Federation and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions – along with representatives from UNESCO.

For 2009 Beirut has the honour, followed by Ljubljana in 2010. Madrid was the first city to receive the tribute, and was succeeded by Alexandria, New Delhi, Antwerp, Montreal, Turin, Bogotá and Amsterdam.

UNESCO said that the jury welcomed the candidacies of two Sub-Saharan cities – Lagos in Nigeria and Porto Novo in Benin – among the seven applicants and "looks forward to finding ways of strengthening literature and book culture in this region."

After nearly two years, top UN envoy bids farewell to Iraq



UN Envoy to Iraq, Staffan de Mistura

15 June - The top United Nations envoy to Iraq is leaving the country after almost two years on the job and will be taking up the post of Deputy Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), it was announced today.

"I leave hopeful that Iraq is on the road of democracy and stability after so much suffering. I am deeply grateful to the Iraqi authorities, and the people of Iraq for the support and confidence they have given the United Nations during this challenging period," Staffan de Mistura, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, said.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has "substantially expanded" its presence and activities inside the country over the past two years, according to a news release issued in Baghdad.

It has contributed to the holding of the Provincial Councils elections, and launched a major initiative aimed at defusing tensions related to disputed internal boundaries and the city of Kirkuk, the Mission added.

Mr. de Mistura said that he was very hopeful that a mechanism set up between the Iraqi Government and the Northern Region of Kurdistan (KRG) to discuss issues of common concern, with UN facilitation, "could become operational in the coming days, based on the principles of a single united Iraq and respect for the Constitution."

At the same time, in the context of improving bilateral cooperation with Iraq's neighbours, the Special Representative voiced optimism that, with the assistance of the UN, both Iraq and Kuwait would use the current opportunity to demonstrate good will and commitment towards a sustainable solution to their pending issues.

Mr. de Mistura has served the UN in conflict-affected areas including Somalia, the Middle East, the Balkans and Nepal.



According to UNAMI, he will continue to take a “close interest” in matters dealing with the Middle East, including Iraq, when he takes up his new assignment at WFP.

Deputy envoy Andrew Gilmour will oversee UNAMI until a new Special Representative is appointed, the Mission noted.

Crucial to ensure credible Afghan polls, stresses UN envoy

15 June - The top United Nations official in Afghanistan has stressed the need to ensure that the elections slated for August are credible and that their results are accepted by all, noting that the candidates can contribute to this by campaigning with “dignity and fairness.”

Kai Eide, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Afghanistan, made the appeal today on the eve of the start of campaigning for the presidential and provincial council elections.

“It is the shared responsibility of all candidates to ensure that these elections strengthen Afghanistan’s democratic institutions and people’s confidence in the democratic process,” he said in a statement issued in Kabul.

He also stressed that “intimidation, inflammatory language and violence of any sort have no place in this election campaign.”

The country’s Independent Electoral Commission has set 20 August as the date for the presidential elections.

The top UN envoy also encouraged all Afghans to take part in the polls, stating that “the strength and legitimacy of a future government and provincial authorities depends on the active participation of the people in these elections.

I therefore appeal to all voters to follow the election campaign closely and to cast their votes on Election Day,” he stated.

Noting that the elections will be administered by Afghan authorities, Mr. Eide said the UN and the international community at large will follow the election process closely and give its full support to an election process that is fair and credible.

Mr. Eide, who also heads the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), met yesterday in separate meetings with presidential candidates Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah to discuss the election process.

He presented them with a set of “Essential Guidelines for Conduct during the Election Process,” which have been issued by the Special Representative and endorsed by the international community. They have also been presented to President Hamid Karzai.

The guidelines aim “to ensure a fair and credible election campaign in which there is a level playing field.

“The aim should be to avoid illegal interference into the election process and the impartiality of government institutions, election officials as well as representatives of the international community. The guidelines are also intended to ensure fairness in the media coverage of the campaign,” according to a statement issued by UNAMA.

Top UN envoy deplors assassination of Iraqi parliamentarian

13 June - The top United Nations official in Iraq has strongly condemned the “shocking” assassination of parliamentarian Harith Al-Ubaidi, who was reportedly shot as he left a mosque in western Baghdad.

Mr. Al-Ubaidi, who headed the Accordance Front-Al Tawaffuq in the Iraqi Council of Representatives, had just left Friday



A ballot for the 20 August 2009 elections in Afghanistan

prayers when he was gunned down yesterday, according to media reports.

Staffan de Mistura, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, described the killing as “particularly deplorable and a tragic loss.”

Mr. Al-Ubaidi was known for his ability to work with all the different groups and political blocs in the country, Mr. de Mistura said, adding that he also worked tirelessly to ensure the rights of detainees and for the enactment of the Human Rights Commission Law.

The Special Representative urged Iraqi authorities to pursue the perpetrators and bring them to justice, according to a statement issued by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

Urging world to disarm, Ban kicks off countdown to UN Day



13 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today launched the “WMD-WeMustDisarm” campaign, beginning the 100-day countdown to the 2009 United Nations International Day of Peace, which this year focuses on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Over the next 100 days leading up to the International Day, observed annually on 21 September, Mr. Ban and others will raise awareness of the need to eliminate nuclear weapons by issuing a daily message, via Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, email and radio, urging the world to disarm.

The Secretary-General is taking the lead by issuing the first 10 'tweets' of the campaign.

“Over the next 100 days, the United Nations and our partners around the world will work to raise awareness of the true costs and dangers of nuclear weapons,” Mr. Ban said in a message to mark the start of the countdown.

“Unless we vigorously work for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, we will continue to face threats from existing nuclear weapons, as well as additional risks that more States, even terrorists, might acquire and deploy such weapons, potentially annihilating millions of people,” he stated.

Joining him in promoting the campaign is UN Messenger of Peace and Academy Award-winning actor and producer Michael Douglas, who has championed the cause of disarmament for the UN since 1998.

Also supporting the campaign is Rainn Wilson, featured actor in the American television comedy, “The Office,” who has more than 800,000 followers on Twitter.

The International Day of Peace was established by the Assembly in 1981 as a day of global ceasefire and non-violence.

“As we observe the International Day of Peace with world leaders gathered in New York for the 64th session of the United Nations General Assembly, I will proclaim one strong, simple message: We Must Disarm!,” stated the Secretary-General.