Speedy, decisive international action to protect civilians in Libya is vital – Ban

24 March - A week after the Security Council authorized “all necessary measures” to protect civilians in Libya from Colonel Muammar Al-Qadhafi’s forces, speedy and decisive action by the world community remains crucial amid serious concerns of human rights abuses, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.

“The international community has acted together to avert a potential larger-scale crisis. I expect the international community to continue to exercise full diligence in avoiding civilian casualties and collateral damage,” he told the 15-member body in a briefing requested by the resolution at the start of consultations on the air and missile strikes launched by several countries to enforce a no-fly zone and hit pro-Qadhafi forces besieging civilians in cities.

“Given the critical situation on the ground, it is imperative that we continue to act with speed and decision. The resolution places great responsibilities on the UN system. I assure you that we will work closely with Member States and regional organizations to coordinate a common, effective and timely response,” he said, citing the resolutions goal of stopping “the brutal campaign of violence by the Libyan regime against its own people.”

In a later encounter with journalists he stressed that the resolution was not aiming for regime change but to protect civilians “because Colonel Qadhafi has been killing his own people.” Among the “serious concerns” he cited were “arrests, disappearances, threats and incitement, including by Colonel Qadhafi on national television.”

Mr. Ban told the Council that although the Libyan authorities have repeatedly claimed to have instituted a ceasefire, there
has been no evidence that that is the case.

“To the contrary, fierce battles have continued in or around the cities of Ajdabiya, Misratah and Zitan, among others. In short, there is no evidence that Libyan authorities have taken steps to carry out their obligations under Resolutions 1970 or 1973,” he said, referring to last week’s resolution and an earlier one calling for a ceasefire and full protection of civilians.

“We continue to have serious concerns… about the protection of civilians, abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, and the access of civilian populations to basic commodities and services in areas currently under siege.”

He detailed the recent visit to the North African country by Special Envoy for Libya Abdel Elah Al Khatib. In Tripoli, the capital, Libyan Foreign Minister Musa Kusa told Mr. Khatib the Government had been forced to act by perceived threats from Al-Qaida and Islamist terrorists, adding that it offered amnesty to rebels who laid down their arms and rebel forces should also be required to abide by any ceasefire.

In Tobruk, eastern Libya, Mr. Khatib met with the armed opposition, who reiterated their call for a ceasefire and lifting the siege by Government forces on some cities in rebel hands. “They also expressed deep concern about the hardships inflicted on the Libyan people and demanded an end to the use of tanks and heavy weaponry targeting civilians,” Mr. Ban said.

Yesterday Mr. Ban discussed with African Union Commission Chairperson Jean Ping cooperation between the UN and the regional organization on Libya, and tomorrow, Mr. Khatib will go to Addis Ababa for an AU meeting which representatives of both the Libyan Government and the opposition will attend in a bid to reach a ceasefire and political solution.

“My Special Envoy’s mission [to Libya] was too brief to reach definitive conclusions about the human rights situation, but they found many worrying signs, including threats and incitement against the armed opposition,” Mr. Ban said.

“Colonel Qadhafi’s threats were aired repeatedly on national television. Journalists continue to be arrested. Foreign reporters in Tripoli told the UN mission about the population’s general state of fear, tight control by the security services, and instances of arrest and disappearances.”

He noted that some 336,000 people have left or fled Libya since the beginning of the crisis, which began five weeks ago as mass protests by civilians seeking an end to Mr. Qadhafi’s 41-year rule, and there are also contingency plans to deal with possible new waves of migrants and refugees of up to 200,000 to 250,000. Meanwhile, the $160 million flash appeal to deal with the exodus and other aspects of the crisis is 63 per cent funded.

Mr. Ban, who was speaking to the Council on his return from a visit to Egypt and Tunisia, where largely peaceful mass protests led to the ousters of entrenched leaders in those countries before the eruption of violence in Libya, said that he was setting up an expert panel, as requested by the resolution, to monitor implementation of sanctions, which include an arms embargo and assets freeze on Libyan Government officials.

As also requested by the resolution, he noted that so far the United Kingdom, France, United States, Denmark, Canada, Italy, Qatar, Belgium, Norway, Spain and the United Arab Emirates have sent letters confirming their participation in the actions to protect Libyan civilians. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has also informed him of its decision to begin an alliance operation in support of the arms embargo.

In his encounter with journalists Mr. Ban described the sense of national pride he found everywhere he went in Egypt and Tunisia. “In the streets and at the highest levels of government, people were speaking the language of democracy, openness, freedom and human rights,” he said.

“The events in Egypt and Tunisia and across the Arab world represent the greatest opportunity for the evolution of democracy and human rights in a generation. It is vital that these transitions succeed,” he added, pledging to mobilize international aid, with special emphasis on socio-economic development.

“Egypt and Tunisia have achieved dramatic change with lightning speed. But now they are caught between spiralling
expectations and reduced economic means. These emerging democracies need jobs, especially for the region’s highly educated young people, who are so optimistic about their future. They need to see the dividend of democracy.”

Also today, Mr. Ban discussed the situation in Libya, as well as in Yemen and Bahrain, with Moroccan Foreign Minister Tahib El Fassi Fihri in a meeting at UN Headquarters.

**Without more funds for fight against TB, millions face death, Ban warns**

24 March - Without additional funding in the battle against tuberculosis for research, improved prevention, early diagnosis and treatment, some 8 million people will die from what is largely a curable disease between now and 2015, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned today.

“There is cause for optimism,” he said in a message marking World Tuberculosis Day. “The recent adoption of a fast and powerful new diagnostic tool promises to accelerate international gains against the disease.

“At the same time, our hope must be tempered by the sobering fact that multi-drug-resistant forms of tuberculosis (MDR-TB) remain an ever-present threat that, if allowed to spread unchecked, could set back the steady progress made during the past two decades.”

He cited major achievements achieved through the UN World Health Organization (WHO) Stop TB Strategy, including impressive improvements in the way TB care is delivered, with well over 40 million people receiving treatment in accordance with the strategy over the past 15 years.

“Prevalence and death rates continue to fall, demonstrating the power of international commitment to save lives,” he said. “This progress could be lost if we are not vigilant. Efforts to carry out the strategy are severely under-funded, as is research to develop additional, badly needed tools. Without further improvements in tuberculosis prevention, early diagnosis and treatment, some 8 million people will die of tuberculosis between now and 2015.”

The WHO Stop TB Strategy seeks to achieve universal access to high-quality care for all people with TB, protect vulnerable populations from TB, TB/HIV and multi-drug-resistant TB, and support development of new tools and enable their timely and effective use. It stresses the need for political commitment with adequate and sustained financing, early detection, standardized treatment with supervision, and effective drug supply and management.

Earlier this week WHO warned that leaving MDR-TB, which does not respond to standard first-line drugs, untreated increases the risk of spread of drug-resistant strains. In 2009, it reported that 9.4 million people became ill with TB and 1.7 million died, including 380,000 people with HIV-associated TB. There were some 440,000 cases of MDR-TB and 150,000 deaths in 2008, the latest year for which estimates are available.

The agency estimates that there will be more than 2 million new cases of MDR-TB between 2011 and 2015.

Noting that TB care still fails to reach everyone in need, Mr. Ban said about a third of those infected do not benefit from accurate diagnosis and appropriate care. “Most of these nearly 3 million people are in vulnerable and marginalized groups, including slum dwellers, migrant workers and drug users,” he added.

“We need to reach them by teaming up with civil society, health workers and businesses. In the 21st century, no one should die from this curable disease. Access to quality health care is a basic human right.”
UN officials urge sustained support for Sierra Leone’s post-conflict recovery

24 March - Senior United Nations officials today urged continued international support for Sierra Leone as it consolidates peace and advance development, and especially as it prepares for next year’s elections, warning that any faltering now could risk the significant progress made so far.

“Despite all achievements in overcoming its civil war, Sierra Leone will remain fragile and vulnerable to sudden economic, social and political shocks, both from outside and from within the country,” Michael von der Schulenburg, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Executive Representative for Sierra Leone, told the Security Council.

He stressed that while the West African nation has made a “truly remarkable” recovery in the nine years since the war ended, it will continue to need strong international support.

“Sierra Leone, which was once a symbol of a failed State, is now gradually evolving into a model country for overcoming old divisions and developing into a peaceful, democratic and prosperous country,” he noted, while adding that “it is not yet out of the woods.”

In his latest report on the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), which is headed by Mr. von der Schulenburg, the Secretary-General noted that all of the country’s achievements will be put to the test by the challenges of conducting peaceful, free and fair presidential, parliamentary and local council elections in 2012.

While the UN and international partners stand ready to assist Sierra Leone and its electoral institutions, Mr. Ban said that the Government and the country’s political parties have a critical role to play in ensuring the success of the elections.

“The success of the elections requires a level playing field; political access by the contestants to all regions of the country; a credible electoral process; and willingness of the contestants to accept the outcome of the process,” he wrote.

Ambassador John McNee of Canada, who chairs the Sierra Leone configuration of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, told the Council it is especially important that the national institutions charged with overseeing the elections and major political parties build a stronger relationship based on improved cooperation and mutual trust.

“Successful elections depend on the commitment of the parties that contest them to play by the rules, and respect results,” he said. “The elections must not only be technically sound, but also widely accepted.”

In his report, Mr. Ban added that among the three risk areas – youth unemployment, corruption and illegal narcotics – identified in the Government’s Agenda for Change, overcoming youth joblessness remains an intractable problem that will require greater commitment on the part of the Government and support from its international partners.

Echoing these comments, Mr. McNee noted that the country’s young people expect progress and prosperity, and that disappointment could present a “latent risk” of political instability.

“Sierra Leone rightly stands as a multilateral success story for peacebuilding. Yet the story is not quite finished. One of the important lessons learned in the past two decades is that peacebuilding requires constant and continued support. Faltering now would risk all that has been gained.”

Sierra Leone is one of five countries – along with Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR), Guinea-Bissau and Liberia – on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission, which was set up in 2005 to help post-conflict countries avoid slipping back into war.

Also addressing the meeting, the country’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Joseph B. Dauda, said
his Government remains committed to the conduct of peaceful, free, fair and transparent elections next year, and welcomes the support of the UN and development partners in what has been identified as a “key test” for the country.

**UN Human Rights Council to appoint a rapporteur to look into Iranian record**

**24 March** - The United Nations Human Rights Council voted today to appoint a special rapporteur to look into the situation in Iran, expressing concern over its lack of cooperation with a previous General Assembly call for the country’s authorities to improve their human rights record.

In a resolution adopted with 22 votes in favour, seven against and 14 abstentions, the 47-member Council said the rapporteur would report to both the Council and to the General Assembly.

The text also called on the Iranian Government to grant access to the country for the independent human rights expert who will take up the rapporteur post.

Earlier this month Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon released an interim report to the Council on the human rights situation within Iran, noting “many areas of continuing concern.”

Mr. Ban said he had been “deeply troubled by reports of increased executions, amputations, arbitrary arrest and detention, unfair trials, and possible torture and ill-treatment of human rights activists, lawyers, journalists and opposition activists.”

The report encouraged the Government in Tehran to address the concerns raised and to fully guarantee freedom of expression and assembly.

Iranian authorities had taken some positive steps, Mr. Ban’s report noted, such as preventing stoning from being used as a method of execution and limiting the application of the death penalty on juvenile offenders.

But “these measures have not been systematically enforced and cases of this nature continue to arise.”

Speaking against the resolution, Iranian representative Seyed Mohammad Reza Sajjadi warned that the Council must not be the domain of the few and must avoid politicization and double standards.

In other developments, the Council agreed to extend the mandate of the special rapporteurs on the following subjects: the human rights situation in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), the right to safe drinking water and sanitation, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, human rights defenders, minority issues and violence against women.

Yesterday the Council agreed to appoint a special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, as well as members of working groups or expert mechanisms on several other subjects.
Million-signature petition to end nuclear weapons goes on display at UN Headquarters

24 March - A one-million signature petition from cities around the world demanding the abolition of nuclear weapons went on exhibition at United Nations Headquarters in New York today in a ceremony attended by Japanese survivors of the first and only use of the devastating bombs.

Organized by Mayors for Peace, which was founded in 1982 by the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the two cities laid waste by atomic bombs in 1945, and now counts 4,540 cities in 150 countries, the exhibition underscores the goal of transcending national borders to fight for nuclear disarmament in what Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called a “landmark occasion” that helps to build international momentum.

“These one million signatures demanding an end to the nuclear threat are the voice of the world’s people. This movement brings together mayors and mothers, like-minded citizens and peace groups. They all understand that nuclear weapons make us less safe, not more,” he told those present, first addressing three ‘hibakusha,’ as atomic bomb survivors are called, including one he met on a visit to Hiroshima last year.

“Everywhere I go, I will repeat my strong, consistent and clear call for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. I will carry the message of the million petitioners represented here today and the many millions more around the world seeking to end the nuclear threat. Together, we can rid the world of nuclear weapons and answer the call of these hibakusha, who survived a nuclear attack and dedicated themselves to making sure no one else would ever suffer the same fate.”

Mr. Ban, who noted that today’s event added to the UN’s permanent disarmament installation – the first exhibit of which emphasizes the importance of the world Organization’s partnership with a global non-governmental organization (NGO) – then signed the petition himself.

Also present was award-winning actor Michael Douglas, a UN Messenger of Peace. “Obviously, any time I can be here to have a reminder, a memoriam of the first and only use of atomic weapons and the destruction they did, I think it’s an important reminder,” he told UN Radio.

Saving traditional medicines from ‘bio-piracy’ patents the goal of UN forum

24 March - Dozens of countries are taking part in a United Nations-sponsored effort to protect potentially life-saving centuries-old traditional medicines from bio-piracy by learning from India how to halt their misappropriation through international patents granted on non-original innovations.

Representatives from more than 35 countries wrapped up a three-day meeting in New Delhi today that discussed emulating India’s Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), a database documenting traditional medicinal treatment, concluding that such a mechanism can fuel future innovation and benefit-sharing in their own nations by protecting traditional knowledge (TK) from misappropriation.

Co-organized by the UN World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and India’s Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the conference heard from countries that are rich in TK, such as Ecuador, Indonesia, Kenya, Peru, Republic of Korea and Thailand, with speakers agreeing on the need to protect traditional knowledge.

TKDL, launched to “assert certain rights against bio-piracy,” provides information on Indian traditional knowledge in languages and format understandable by patent examiners at International Patent Offices (IPOs), thus acting as a bridge between traditional knowledge information existing in local languages and patent examiners at IPOs to prevent the grant of
“TKDL gives legitimacy to the existing traditional knowledge and enables protection of such information from getting patented by the fly-by-night inventors acquiring patents on India’s traditional knowledge systems,” the library says, stressing that it will prevent misappropriation by breaking the format and language barrier, thus enabling patent examiners to carry out search and examination.

In a statement to the conference WIPO Director General Francis Gurry said TKDL is an excellent example of a technical platform which can work alongside legislative frameworks. India’s TKDL could be a good model for others and WIPO is ready to facilitate international collaboration for countries which were interested in establishing their own systems, he added.

Closing the conference which he called “path-breaking… extremely successful,” WIPO Executive Director Naresh Prasad said it had fulfilled its objective to disseminate information about TKDL as a model for the protection of traditional knowledge. Such knowledge is a source of innovation and could inspire life-saving medicines, he said, adding that it should also be shared and communities should participate and benefit.

“It is up to Member States to tell us if and how to proceed and where to take things from here,”

Mr. Prasad said, calling on them to provide feedback on whether they wish it to enter into an institutional arrangement with the CSIR to facilitate the sharing of the TKDL model.

The library notes that India fought successfully for the revocation of turmeric and basmati patents granted by the United States Patent and Trademark Office and a neem tree anti-fungal patent granted by European Patent Office (EPO). These have been used in India for thousands of years.

WIPO is a specialized UN agency that is dedicated to developing a balanced and accessible international intellectual property (IP) system, which rewards creativity, stimulates innovation and contributes to economic development while safeguarding the public interest.

Death toll from post-electoral violence in Côte d’Ivoire rising, UN reports

24 March - The death toll from the post-electoral violence that has gripped Côte d’Ivoire continues to rise, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the West African nation reported today, while warning that systematic attacks on civilians could constitute crimes against humanity.

“The total number of deaths since mid-December 2010 is now more than 462,” Guillaume Ngefa, the deputy head of the human rights division of the UN Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI), told a news conference in the commercial capital of Abidjan.

The country plunged into turmoil late last year after then incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo lost a UN-certified and internationally recognized election to opposition figure Alassane Ouattara in November. Mr. Gbagbo has refused to step down and his supporters have been waging a campaign of violent intimidation of their political rivals.

Mr. Ngefa said that the violence perpetrated in one week against the civilian population in certain neighbourhoods in the north of Abidjan has resulted in 52 deaths, including five children and seven women, as well as dozens of injured.

In New York, UN humanitarian chief Valerie Amos voiced serious concern about the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in Côte d’Ivoire, particularly over the past month.

“The escalation of violence and use of heavy weaponry, particularly in urban areas, is taking an increasing toll on civilians,”
said Ms. Amos, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

She also voiced concern about the increasing targeting and harassment of immigrants from other parts of West Africa, thousands of whom are fleeing the country, as well as the destruction of civilian property and the ongoing harassment and obstruction of aid workers.

“I call on those involved in the violence to respect civilians including aid workers and to allow rapid, safe and unimpeded access by humanitarian organizations,” she said.

Highlighting some of the recent violence, Mr. Ngefa said the neighbourhood of Abobo had been bombarded with rockets by elements of the Ivorian Defence and Security Forces (FDS), and that the rockets had killed 19 people on the night of 17-18 March.

“The FDS, supported by young militias, invaded Adjamé, Attécoubé, Williamsville and Yopougon, firing and launching grenades indiscriminately on civilians they suspected of being pro-Ouattara,” said Mr. Ngefa.

He added that Akekoi village, considered to be a pro-Gbagbo bastion in Abobo with the majority of its residents being of the Attié ethnic group, was attacked by armed youths. “At least one civilian was killed during the attack,” he said, adding that isolated cases of post-electoral violence had also been reported in Sinfra and Agboville.

“People in Abobo, Williamsville, Yopougon and other neighbourhoods in Abidjan continue to leave in huge numbers because of the fighting and the lack of access to food and medicines,” said Mr. Ngefa, echoing the assessment given just days ago by the UN refugee agency.

During the weekend and on Monday, monitors with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) saw thousands of people trying to leave from Adjamé and Yopougon bus terminals in Abidjan. An estimated 300,000 people in Abidjan are displaced, many of them former residents of Abobo, according to the agency.

Mr. Ngefa reminded FDS officials, elements of the “Commando invisible” and other actors in the post-electoral crisis that systematic attacks against civilians could constitute crimes against humanity.

UNOCI, in accordance with its mandate to protect civilians, is continuing to provide support to the population, through patrols, medical assistance and monitoring and reporting of human rights violations, he added.

The 9,000-strong UNOCI has been supporting the stabilization and reunification efforts in the country over the past seven years following the end of the civil war that in 2002 split the country into a Government-held south and a rebel-controlled north.

UN rights experts sound alarm on wave of enforced disappearances in Libya

24 March - A group of independent United Nations human rights experts today voiced deep concern about hundreds of alleged enforced disappearances that have taken place in recent months in Libya, where what started as peaceful civilian protests demanding the ouster of Muammar Al-Qadhafi has turned into a violent military crackdown by the regime of the opposition.

“Enforced disappearances may amount to a crime against humanity when perpetrated in certain circumstances,” warned the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

According to information received by the group, which is tasked with assisting families determine the fate or whereabouts of disappeared relatives, hundreds of people have been taken to undisclosed locations where they might have been submitted to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments or executed.
In most of the cases reported, the fate and the whereabouts of these persons are still unknown, the group noted in a news release, calling on all States to eradicate the practice of enforced disappearance.

The group is comprised of five independent experts: Chair-Rapporteur Jeremy Sarkin (South Africa), Ariel Dulitzky (Argentina), Jasmina Dzumhur (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Osman El-Hajjé (Lebanon) and Olivier de Frouville (France).

The crisis in Libya, where public protests erupted earlier this year as part of a wider movement calling for reform across North Africa and the Middle East, has led to widespread displacement, attacks on civilians and human rights abuses. Some 325,000 people have fled the violence in Libya, most of them non-Libyan migrants crossing over to Tunisia and Egypt.

Last week the UN Security Council adopted a resolution by which it set up a no-fly zone over Libya, authorized Member States to take “all necessary measures” for the protection for civilians, and called for an immediate ceasefire.

**UN official pays tribute to legacy of former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld**

24 March - The values and ideas embodied by the former United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld – from championing human rights to promoting democracy to fighting poverty – remain more relevant than ever, half a century after his death, a senior UN official said today.

Kiyo Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, told a forum in Espoo, Finland, dedicated to discussing the legacy of Mr. Hammarskjöld that the values he expressed when UN chief “remain unchallengeable” now, despite the enormous global changes of the past 50 years.

“Moreover, the conscience that he inspired in the United Nations – of active service in the common interest – is now manifested in many of its greatest undertakings,” Mr. Akasaka told the Hanaforum, citing “the embrace of human rights, the fight against impunity, the spread of democratic principles, the preservation of our global commons” and the battle to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by their target date of 2015.

“This conscience is living and breathing. We see it most dramatically in the revolutionary changes taking place in the Middle East and North Africa.”

Mr. Hammarskjöld was the second UN Secretary-General, serving from April 1953 until September 1961, when he was killed in a plane crash while trying to resolve a crisis in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize later that year.

Mr. Akasaka said Mr. Hammarskjöld still inspired UN staff today with his view that our “fate is what we make of it,” but he added that for the world body to remain strong and to continue to make a difference, its 192 Member States need to demonstrate their active support.

“IT will continue to require that governments give priority to the general global good rather than to specific national interests. This is not an abstract statement. Member States and governments are composed of individuals — men and women — whose vision and compassion create the institutions and spirit that animates the United Nations. The United Nations is us. And the values that unite us must continue to be the ones that motivate the United Nations.”
DPR Korea needs $1 million to curb foot-and-mouth disease, UN agency says

24 March - Around $1 million of equipment and vaccines are urgently needed to help stem outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), where farm animals are crucial to food security, the United Nations warned today.

Such efforts need to be followed by a more prolonged and concerted effort to modernize veterinary services in the country, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said in a news release following a joint mission it made with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) mission at the Government's request earlier this month.

FMD does not pose a direct health threat to humans, but affected animals become too weak to be used to plough the soil or reap harvests, suffer significant weight loss, and produce less milk. Many animals are dying from the highly contagious disease, which affects cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, swine and other cloven-hoofed animals and spreads through body fluids that can contaminate clothing, crates, truck beds and hay.

The mission found that DPRK’s capacity to detect and contain FMD needs significant strengthening, in particular in biosecurity measures and improving laboratory infrastructure and capacity.

Outbreaks have been reported in eight of the 13 provinces in DPRK, which has a livestock population of about 577,000 cattle, 2.2 million pigs and 3.5 million goats.

To bring the situation under control, the mission recommended thorough surveillance to locate and map disease clusters; protecting unaffected farms through movement controls and bio-security measures; adequate sampling to correctly identify the virus strain or strains involved; and strategic use of the appropriate vaccines to contain and isolate disease clusters.

The FAO-OIE mission visited several collective farms, the national veterinary laboratory and various animal health field stations, providing guidance on taking and handling FMD samples.

Only by accurately typing the virus or viruses involved in the outbreaks will it be possible to identify the most effective vaccine to use against it, FAO said.

Head of UN rural development agency set to offer help on visit to drought-hit Kenya

24 March - The head of the United Nations rural development agency is set to arrive in Kenya on Saturday to offer assistance to the Horn of Africa nation, where nearly 2.4 million poor people in rural areas are struggling to get enough to eat as a result of the recent drought.

The visit by Kanayo F. Nwanze, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), follows the release earlier this month of a report by the Kenyan Government and its partners showing a rapid decline in food security among some agricultural households.

The report found that the number of people needing food and other assistance jumped by 50 per cent in just six months, from 1.6 million in August 2010 to 2.4 million in February 2011.

During his visit, Mr. Nwanze will discuss issues such as the need to boost the incomes of smallholder farmers and rural entrepreneurs and better equipping them to manage risks, which will enable them to both feed their families and contribute to economic growth and food security in the country.
He will also address new opportunities for business in rural areas presented by changing agricultural markets. These will require more investment to help rural people deal with issues such as food price volatility, risks posed by severe weather such as the drought and long-term uncertainties due to climate change.

In addition to meeting with Government officials, Mr. Nwanze will also visit projects IFAD is supporting in the central and eastern parts of the country, including those focusing on improving rural livelihoods, especially among women. He will also inaugurate a new maternity facility, a borehole and a water treatment plant built with project funds.

Mr. Nwanze will also review the progress of several initiatives on Mount Kenya, including one that works with community groups to address rising poverty linked to deterioration of natural resources, particularly water, related to poor agricultural practices.

Since 1979, IFAD has invested more than $214 million to support Kenyan Government efforts to reduce rural poverty.

**UN officials underline the right to truth for victims of gross human rights abuses**

24 March - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today underscored the right of the victims of gross human rights abuses and their families to know the truth about the circumstances surrounding the violations, the reasons they were perpetrated and the identity of the people responsible.

“Knowing the truth offers individual victims and their relatives a way to gain closure, restore their dignity and experience at least some remedy for their losses,” Mr. Ban said in a message to mark the first International Day for the Right to the Truth of Victims of Gross Human Rights Violations.

“Exposing the truth also helps entire societies to foster accountability for violations. And since the process of determining the truth often involves fact-finding inquiries and public testimony by victims and perpetrators, it can provide catharsis and help produce a shared history of events that facilitates healing and reconciliation,” he added.

Mr. Ban noted that the Right to the Truth is now provided for in the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which entered into force in December last year.

The date was chosen to commemorate the day El Salvadorian human rights defender, Monsignor Óscar Arnulfo Romero, was shot dead in 1980 while celebrating mass in a chapel. He had been outspoken in his condemnation of abuses against the most vulnerable people in his country.

Navi Pillay, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her message said 42,633 people have disappeared and remain unaccounted for over the past 31 years since the murder of Monsignor Romero.

“Victims of gross violations of human rights and their families have the inalienable right to know the truth about past events concerning the perpetration of heinous crimes against them,” said Ms. Pillay.

“They have the right to know about the circumstances and reasons that led, through massive or systematic violations, to the perpetration of those crimes. They have the right to know who the perpetrators are, and the fate and whereabouts of the victims,” she said.

She urged States to take all appropriate measures to give effect to the right to the truth, the right to justice and the right to reparations.

“These three indispensable rights are at the core of the fight against impunity and the restoration of the dignity of victims,” added Ms. Pillay.
She said the truth must be brought to right through public, independent and impartial inquiries into gross violations such as torture, rape, sexual slavery, disappearances and killings.

“In recent years, my office has supported a number of fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry into reports of gross violations in a number of countries, including the one on Libya, which was created by the [UN] Human Rights Council last month,” said Ms. Pillay.