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Syria: UN observers blocked from entering town of al-Haffeh, fired at upon departure

12 June - Following repeated efforts, UN observers were unable to reach the Syrian town of al-Haffeh today as angry crowds surrounded their vehicles, stopping them from proceeding any further, after which they were shot at as they departed.

“The crowd, who appeared to be residents of the area, hurled stones and metal rods at the UN vehicles. The UN observers turned back,” the spokesperson for the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), Sausan Ghosheh, said today.

“As they were leaving the area, three vehicles heading towards Idlib were fired upon – the source of fire is still unclear,” she added in a statement, noting that the observers had returned safely to their bases.

UNSMIS staff members have been trying to reach al-Haffeh since 7 June, but have been impeded by the ongoing violence in the area. The city is reportedly besieged, with heavy fighting going on.

“UNSMIS calls on the parties to grant the UN observers immediate and unfettered access to conflict zones,” Ms. Ghosheh said.

On Monday, UNSMIS observers reported heavy fighting in Rastan and Talbiseh, north of the city of Homs, with the use of



Smoke drifts into the sky from buildings and houses hit by shelling in Homs, Syria.
UN Photo/David Manyua

artillery and mortar shelling, as well as firing from helicopters, machine guns and smaller arms.

The UN estimates that more than 10,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in Syria and tens of thousands displaced since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began some 16 months ago.

UNSMIS observers have been charged with monitoring the cessation of violence in Syria, as well as monitoring and supporting the full implementation of a six-point peace plan put forward by the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League for the Syrian Crisis, Kofi Annan.

The peace plan calls for an end to violence, access for humanitarian agencies to provide relief to those in need, the release of detainees, the start of inclusive political dialogue that takes into account the aspirations of the Syrian people, and unrestricted access to the country for the international media.

Speaking with journalists in Geneva today, the Joint Special Envoy's spokesperson addressed questions on the formation of an international contact group on Syria by Mr. Annan.

"The objective of creating this group is to give teeth to the [six-point peace] plan... to convince the parties to implement the plan in its entirety. It is not to create a new plan, because, as we have said before, this is the only plan on the table at the moment," the spokesperson, Ahmad Fawzi, said.

"What is lacking is implementation and that is why we count on these Member States with influence on the parties – during this meeting, and as a result of this meeting – to put irrevocable pressure on the parties to implement the plan and stop the killing and begin a political transition," he added.

Mr. Fawzi said that Joint Special Envoy Annan is encouraged by signs that Member States are taking the idea of a contact group "very seriously."

"We hope that this contact group meeting will take place soon, but a venue, and a time, and a list of participants is yet to come together," he stated. "It's coming together."

In a statement issued on Monday night, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's spokesperson said that the UN chief "reiterates his call for all countries with influence on either side to convince them to put the welfare of Syrians first, to pull back from the brink and to reflect on the devastating consequences that increasing violence is having for the people of Syria, the country and the region."

The spokesperson added that Mr. Ban remains ready to work with the entire international community to assist the sides to achieve a political solution to the crisis.

In a statement issued later on Tuesday, the spokesperson for the President of the General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, said he remains deeply concerned about the continued killings, reported massacres and violence in Syria, especially in Houla, Mazraat al-Qubeir and in al-Haffe.

"The President of the General Assembly calls on the Syrian authorities and all other parties to grant safe and unhindered access to the UNSMIS, and also to all UN humanitarian and human rights personnel who are working to assist the affected communities, in accordance with international law and commitments made in this regard," Mr. Al-Nasser's spokesperson said.

The spokesperson added that Mr. Al-Nasser reiterates his call on all parties of the Syrian crisis, especially the Government, to cease all military operations and violent attacks immediately, and protect its civilians in accordance with its legal responsibilities.

UN seeks \$198 million for humanitarian needs in DPR Korea in 2012



Farmers harvest their crops in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Photo: FAO/Belay Derza Gaga

12 June - Amid funding concerns for ongoing activities, the United Nations seeks \$198 million to address critical humanitarian needs in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 2012.

“Sixteen million people continue to suffer from chronic food insecurity, high malnutrition rates, and deep-rooted economic problems,” the UN Resident Coordinator in the DPRK, Jerome Sauvage, said in a news release. “Inadequate medical supplies and equipment make the health care system unable to meet basic needs, while the water and heating systems need to be rehabilitated.”

The Overview Funding Document (OFD), which outlines the funding needs for the UN's humanitarian activities in DPRK, was presented to the international donor community in Beijing today, and in Pyongyang on 7 June. It also describes the current situation and the efforts being made to improve it in food and nutritional assistance, agricultural support and interventions in the water, sanitation, hygiene and health sectors.

According to the Resident Coordinators' office, around two million people in the country's most food insecure areas are currently receiving nutritious food assistance.

About 10,300 children will be treated for severe acute malnutrition and 57,000 for moderate acute malnutrition. The cereal deficit for the 2011/12 marketing year was estimated at 739,000 metric tons, leading to an uncovered cereal deficit of 414,000 metric tons.

The UN's humanitarian focus in DPRK is on mitigating the protracted crisis through a sustained humanitarian response that addresses immediate and intermediate needs, while also addressing some of the root causes of the vulnerabilities in order to build resilience and sustainable livelihoods.

“External assistance is still needed and continues to play a vital role in safeguarding and promoting the well-being of millions whose food security, nutritional status and general health would otherwise be seriously compromised,” said Mr. Sauvage.

In 2011, the UN called for \$218 million to address humanitarian needs in DPRK – it received some \$85 million from donors, led by the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Due to the lack of funds, humanitarian agencies have been unable to effectively address humanitarian needs.

“The UN in DPRK remains seriously underfunded. Provision of assistance must be based on the humanitarian principles: humanity, neutrality and impartiality, and not be contingent on political developments,” said Mr. Sauvage. “Separating humanitarian needs from political issues is a prerequisite for a sustainable improvement in the condition of people.”

Financed by voluntary contributions from Member States, non-governmental organizations, local governments, the private sector and individual donors, the CERF is a humanitarian fund established by the United Nations to enable more timely and reliable humanitarian assistance to those affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts, helping agencies to pre-position funding for humanitarian action.

UN health agency re-classifies diesel engine exhaust as 'carcinogenic to humans'



Photo: IRIN/David Swanson

12 June - More than a decade after it was classified as 'probably carcinogenic to humans,' the UN health agency today classified diesel engine exhaust as 'carcinogenic to humans.'

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), which is part of the World Health Organization (WHO), announced the re-classification today, after a week-long meeting of international experts, and based its decision on sufficient evidence that exposure is associated with an increased risk for lung cancer.

"The scientific evidence was compelling and the working group's conclusion was unanimous: diesel engine exhaust causes lung cancer in humans," said the chairperson of the IARC working group which reviewed the evidence, Dr. Christopher Portier, in a news release.

"Given the additional health impacts from diesel particulates, exposure to this mixture of chemicals should be reduced worldwide," he added.

According to IARC, large populations are exposed to diesel exhaust in everyday life, whether through their occupation or through the ambient air. People are exposed not only to motor vehicle exhausts but also to exhausts from other diesel engines, including from other modes of transport, such as diesel trains and ships, and from power generators.

There had been mounting concern about the cancer-causing potential of diesel exhaust, particularly based on findings in epidemiological studies of workers exposed in various settings, the research agency noted.

The IARC working group reviewed the evidence and, overall, it concluded that there was sufficient evidence in humans for the carcinogenicity of diesel exhaust. In particular, it found that there was sufficient evidence to determine that diesel exhaust is a cause of lung cancer, and noted that there a positive association with an increased risk of bladder cancer.

The working group also concluded that gasoline exhaust was possibly carcinogenic to humans, a finding unchanged from a previous evaluation in 1989.

IARC stated that governments and other decision-makers now have a valuable evidence-base on which to consider environmental standards for diesel exhaust emissions and to continue to work with the engine and fuel manufacturers towards those goals.

"While IARC's remit is to establish the evidence-base for regulatory decisions at national and international level, today's conclusion sends a strong signal that public health action is warranted," said the Director of IARC, Dr. Christopher Wild. "This emphasis is needed globally, including among the more vulnerable populations in developing countries where new technology and protective measures may otherwise take many years to be adopted."

In 1988, IARC had classified diesel exhaust as probably carcinogenic to humans. An Advisory Group, which reviews and recommends future priorities for the agency, had recommended diesel exhaust as a high priority for re-evaluation since 1998.

UN human rights experts speak out on World Day Against Child Labour

12 June - On the occasion of World Day Against Child Labour, two United Nations independent human rights experts today highlighted that of the 215 million children working throughout the world, more than half are subjected to the worst forms of child labour, including sexual and labour exploitation.

“One of the most abhorrent forms of child slavery is found in mining and quarrying, where children start work from the age of three,” said the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Gulnara Shahinian, in a news release.

She added that children working in this sector, the majority of whom are boys, “are treated as commodities and face particular physical, psychological, economic and sexual exploitation.”

Recent reports show that with the current economic crises there is more reliance on commodities such as gold, a demand that has increased the numbers of boys and girls working in mines and quarries.

“During my country visits, I have seen how unscrupulous employers take advantage of children’s small physique for artisanal mining which results in their stunted growth. In artisanal mining, both boys and girls handle highly toxic chemicals to extract minerals exposing them to irreversible health damages,” Ms. Shahinian said, noting the physically demanding work the children are subjected to in such circumstances.

The Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Najat Maalla M’jid, said that the sexual exploitation of children is a serious human rights violation which gravely compromises the integrity, health and development of children, as well as the full enjoyment of their rights.

“Although States and the whole international community have undertaken, via the ratification of international and regional instruments and other initiatives, to combat this phenomenon, the sexual exploitation of children in countries of all regions persists and reaches sometimes alarming levels,” Ms. Maalla M’jid said.

She urged States to fulfil their responsibility to protect, rehabilitate and reintegrate victims, provide reparation for damage caused to children, penalize those responsible, change certain social norms, and ultimately prevent this phenomenon.

In addition, both Ms. Shahinian and Ms. Maalla M’jid said that they shared the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) concerns that efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour are slowing down, and called for a boosted global campaign to end the practice.

On Monday, ILO released a report which found that a large gap remains between the ratification of Conventions on child labour and the actions countries take to deal with the problem.

“There is no room for complacency when 215 million children are still labouring to survive and more than half of these are exposed to the worst forms of child labour,” said ILO’s Director-General Juan Somavia.

According to ILO, new estimates released on 1 June showed that some five million children are caught in forced labour, which includes conditions such as commercial sexual exploitation and debt bondage – and this is thought to be an underestimate.



Gulnara Shahinian, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

Oscar-winning actress to promote technology for women and girls in new UN role

12 June - The United Nations telecoms agency has designated Academy Award-winning Hollywood actress Geena Davis as a special envoy to promote the empowering role technology can play in the lives of women and girls.

Among her duties will be to promote the 'Tech Needs Girls' campaign of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) – a three-year campaign that seeks to raise global awareness of the role information and communication technologies (ICTs) can play in empowering women.

"I am delighted that Ms. Davis will be joining us in our campaign to help expand the opportunities open to women and girls, and redress the current gender imbalance in the ICT industry," said ITU's Secretary-General, Hamadoun Touré.

The new Special Envoy for Women and Girls in the field of technology said she is "thrilled" with her latest role with the ITU.

"This role will enable me to take the work I'm doing to a much bigger scale globally, through developing and consulting on strategies to advance gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women in ICTs," said Ms. Davis.

"It's incredibly important to get more women and girls connected to technology, and a big factor in making this happen is going to be ITU's work," she added.

The 'Tech Needs Girls' campaign aims to highlight the potential of technology to transform women's lives, whether it be through ICT-based career choices or by improved access to services like e-health, e-education, e-commerce, e-banking and a host of new applications and devices that can help girls and women address their day-to-day challenges, ITU stated in a news release.

It seeks to do this with the help of high-profile ambassadors such as Ms. Davis, as well as with an extensive programme of online multimedia content, major advocacy events around the globe and key partnerships with industry, government, civil society and other UN agencies.

Earlier this year, the Geneva-based ITU launched a multilingual web portal focused on helping girls and women access training, job opportunities and career information in the ICT sector.

The Girls in ICT Portal houses over 400 programmes, including over 100 scholarship programmes and an equal number of contests and awards, some 60 training and internship opportunities, over 100 online networks offering career support and mentoring, as well as tech camps and other activities.



Special Envoy for Women and Girls in the field of technology, Geena Davis.
Photo: ITU Pictures

UN and partners relocate refugees in South Sudan to relieve overcrowding



A group of colourfully dressed women with their children after arriving at the Yusuf Batil settlement in Upper Nile state, South Sudan. Photo: UNHCR/P.Rulashe

12 June - The United Nations refugee agency and its partners have relocated 8,000 Sudanese refugees from a transit site in the north-east of South Sudan to relieve overcrowding.

The move over the weekend follows several deaths, and the prospect of new arrivals of up to 15,000 refugees into South Sudan's Upper Nile state, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Adrian Edwards, told reporters in Geneva.

South Sudan is currently hosting more than 150,000 refugees from Sudan, many of whom have fled conflict and lack of food in their homeland. Over 112,000 of these are in Upper Nile state, while a further 51,000 are in settlements further west in Unity state.

Last week, the non-governmental organization *Médecins Sans Frontières* reported seven deaths among recent arrivals at the transit site of Hofra, about 25 kilometres from the border with Sudan.

"The deaths are believed to be linked to the weak state the refugees arrived in after walking for weeks from Blue Nile state with little to eat or drink," said Mr. Edwards, adding that these risk factors are amplified by the dwindling supply of water in Hofra.

The weekend emergency relocation began after food and other relief items had been distributed to all 32,000 refugees in Hofra. UNHCR took the refugees to another transit site called Kilo 18, where an estimated two weeks of water supply is available. From Kilo 18, the refugees will be relocated permanently to UNHCR's newest camp in Upper Nile state, called Yusuf Batil.

UNHCR is working with the South Sudanese authorities and local communities to identify additional refugee sites outside Maban county, where the refugees are currently hosted.

"We are searching for a suitable site in Melut county where water would be sourced from the Nile – the hope being to relocate refugees from Jammam camp to ease the pressure on limited water supplies," Mr. Edwards said.

Ban urges Arab media and civil society to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. UN Photo/Mark Garten

12 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today hailed the dedication and courage of journalists, activists, policy-makers and civil society representatives who have worked to promote democracy across the Middle East and North Africa, and urged them to continue their efforts to advance peace, especially among Israelis and Palestinians.

"You gather at a pivotal time in the Middle East and North Africa," Mr. Ban said in a message to the two-day, UN-backed International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East Peace that began in Geneva today. "The world has witnessed profound changes across the region in the past 18 months, driven by brave and committed citizens, with women and youth in the vanguard."

The UN chief noted in the message – which was delivered by Maher Nasser, Acting Head of the Department of Public Information (DPI) – that journalists, activists, policy-makers and representatives of civil society have played important roles in these historic movements for change.

“I salute your dedication and courage in promoting transparency, accountability and democracy. I urge you to continue to promote peace and increase mutual understanding between communities, especially Palestinians and Israelis,” he said.

The annual seminar, established by the General Assembly in 1991, is designed to look at the role of the media in advancing the peace process – one which is currently at a standstill. Israeli-Palestinian talks have been stalled since late September, following Israel’s refusal to extend a 10-month freeze on settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Mr. Ban said the regional awakening based on the ideals of freedom, dignity and non-violence cannot be complete without a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“Too many Palestinians and Israelis have suffered for too many years,” he stated. “I am concerned at the fragility of the situation on the ground, and I urge the parties to overcome the current obstacles and resume direct, bilateral negotiations without delay or preconditions.”

He pledged that the UN will remain engaged in helping the parties to forge a way forward, with the aim of establishing a sovereign, independent, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel.

“Only then will we be able to move towards the broader goal of comprehensive regional peace in the Middle East,” said the Secretary-General.

This year’s seminar, organized by DPI in cooperation with the Government of Switzerland, will examine issues such as the impact of the Arab Spring on media coverage of the question of Palestine and the role of women’s activism and the media in the Israeli-Palestinian peace and the wider region.

In his remarks to the gathering, Mr. Nasser stated that the objective of the seminar, which is taking place during a period of “profound and tumultuous change,” is two-fold.

It seeks to sensitize public opinion on the question of Palestine, he said, and to examine some of the evolving media-related dynamics shaping events in the region, while exploring how they relate to the situation between Israelis and Palestinians.

“Our discussions will focus on the role of the media in covering different aspects of recent events in the Middle East, and how they relate to the situation in Israel and Palestine,” he said. “This is an opportunity for representatives of the media and civil society from the region and beyond to come together to share their experiences and exchange views.”

The past 16 months have witnessed historic changes as a wave of popular uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East, which became known collectively as the Arab Spring, led to changes in government in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, and to uprisings in Bahrain and Syria, among other countries.

EU should see beyond border control regarding Tunisia migrants – UN expert



Makeshift living conditions for the residents of Tunisia's Choucha camp.
Photo: UNHCR/F.Kayal

12 June - A United Nations independent human rights expert called today on the European Union (EU) to develop a migration mechanism currently being negotiated with Tunisia by concentrating on the respect, protection and promotion of the human rights of migrants.

“A large majority of regional migration initiatives coming from the EU continue to be focused on issues of border control, and do not consider important issues such as the facilitation of regular migration channels,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau, in a news release published at the end of his first visit to the North African country.

“I encourage the European authorities to develop a more nuanced policy of migration cooperation with Tunisia, which moves beyond security issues to develop new initiatives in consultation and in real partnership with Tunisian authorities, which place at their core the respect, protection and promotion of the human rights of

migrants,” he added.

Mr. Crépeau was in Tunisia from 3-8 June, as part of his year-long study of the management of the EU’s external borders, which will take him to key transit countries and entry points for the bloc.

Late last year, the EU presented a new immigration strategy that includes plans to attract more foreign workers in coming years to deal with skills shortages and make it easier for legal immigrants to enter the EU.

According to the EU’s official website, the migration mechanism – known as Mobility Partnerships – are initially being offered to the EU’s immediate neighbours, as well as Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. The Partnerships offer a concrete framework for dialogue and cooperation between the EU and non-EU countries, focussed on facilitating and organizing legal migration, effective and humane measures to address irregular migration, and concrete steps towards reinforcing the development outcomes of migration.

The Special Rapporteur urged EU member states to take all necessary measures to rescue migrants in distress in the Mediterranean Sea, including rescuing ships and taking those on board to a safe port of disembarkation, and to intensify its efforts to search for the 300 Tunisians who are reported to have disappeared while crossing its waters.

Noting that there is no adequate refugee status determination procedure in Tunisia, Mr. Crépeau also drew attention to the situation of migrants there, and expressed concern that irregular border crossing remains a criminal offence in the country, contravening fundamental principles of human rights including the right to leave one’s country.

“Whilst the Tunisian authorities insist that this is not regularly applied against Tunisians, I learned of cases where it was in fact used, including against foreigners entering Tunisia irregularly, and who were subsequently imprisoned for the alleged offence,” he said. “I also met with an unaccompanied minor who had been charged with crossing the border into Tunisia illegally, and sentenced to nine days prison.”

During his six-day mission, the Special Rapporteur visited Tunis, the Port of Zarsis, the border point with Libya at Ras Jedir, places of migrant detention, including prisons and reception centres, and the Choucha Refugee camp. He met with Government, civil society and international organisations representatives, and with migrants from a range of countries residing in Tunisia.

Mr. Crépeau’s year-long project on the human rights of migrants will result in a special thematic report, which will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2013.

Independent experts, or special rapporteurs, are appointed by the Geneva-based Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not United Nations staff, nor are they paid for their work.

DR Congo: UN envoy stresses need to end armed mutiny, suffering of civilians

12 June - It is vital to put an end to the armed mutiny that began in April in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) which has led to a worsening of the security situation and a major displacement of civilians, a senior United Nations official told the Security Council today.

The mutiny “now threatens a general destabilization of the Kivus and region, and dramatically increases the general threat to millions of civilians,” said the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC (MONUSCO), Roger Meece.



Special Representative Roger Meece. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

“It is important to put an end to the mutiny as soon as possible for multiple reasons,” he added, noting that it would permit the return home of large numbers of displaced civilians, a timely resumption of coordinated efforts targeting armed groups

in area, and the resumption of stabilization and economic development programmes.

The fighting between government troops and renegade fighters in North and South Kivu provinces, following the mutiny by soldiers led by Bosco Ntaganda and Sultani Makenga, has left more than 100,000 people displaced, including those who have fled to Rwanda and Uganda, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In his briefing to the Council, Mr. Meece said that MONUSCO has credible information regarding killings on a significant scale and other serious crimes committed in the Kivus, including rape and other forms of sexual violence. The fighting has also greatly limited humanitarian access through the region.

The UN mission has deployed peacekeepers and stepped up operations throughout the affected area, he said, noting that, "Our resources, however, have been stretched to the limits attempting to cover developing hot spots, and the overall situation in North Kivu has been deteriorating."

The envoy added that MONUSCO has no means of verifying allegations of support being provided to the mutinous forces from across the Rwandan border. At the same time, he stated, it is important to put an end to any or all external support the mutinous forces may receive.

"The people of eastern Congo have already suffered too much and for too long, and any actions that prolong violence and armed conflict in the region must stop," Mr. Meece said.

The Special Representative also reported that the activities of the Ugandan rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continue to represent a threat not only to north-eastern DRC but other countries in the region as well. "The brutal LRA actions continue to provoke enormous fear throughout the region where they operate," he said.

Mr. Meece added that while it is important to recover from the security setbacks as soon as possible in the Kivus, it is also vital to move forward on a broader agenda aimed at addressing the key underlying causes of conflict in eastern DRC and ensuring much-needed durable security and development throughout the country.

Myanmar: UN envoy discusses state of emergency with President



Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for Myanmar Vijay Nambiar. Photo: UNIC/Yangon

12 June - The United Nations envoy for Myanmar met today with the country's president and discussed the state of emergency that has been declared in northern Rakhine state following the recent outbreak of violence.

The Secretary-General's Special Adviser for Myanmar, Vijay Nambiar, is currently in the South-east Asian nation to participate in a meeting with government leaders, including President Thein Sein, in the capital, Naypyitaw.

He and the President discussed the state of emergency and the need for the Government "to continue to handle the situation transparently and with respect for human rights and the rule of law, consistent with President Thein Sein's recent statement in order that the cycle of violence is broken and the broader reform process not adversely affected," UN spokesperson Martin Nesirky told reporters in New York.

Mr. Nambiar's visit follows the one made by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in late April, during which he pledged the UN's continued support for Myanmar as it continues with the process of national reconciliation and democratic transition begun last year by Mr. Sein.

The violence in Rakhine state, reported to be between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims, has left at least a dozen civilians dead and hundreds of homes destroyed since last Friday, according to media reports.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today called on Bangladesh to keep its borders open in

light of the rapid escalation of violence in Rakhine state, following media reports quoting a statement of the Bangladeshi Border Guard force that it had turned away a number of boats carrying people from Myanmar.

“UNHCR is advocating with the Bangladeshi authorities to allow safe haven on its territory for those who need immediate safety and medical assistance,” spokesperson Adrian Edwards told a news conference in Geneva.

“Previously people have been allowed in to Bangladesh for medical treatment. We hope that such good practices will be maintained,” he added.

The refugee agency is trying to monitor key crossing points along the border between the two countries following the temporary relocation of its staff in the area.

There are presently more than 30,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar living in two camps in the district of Cox’s Bazaar in Bangladesh. There are an additional 200,000 “unregistered persons of concern” from Myanmar in Bangladesh, for whom UNHCR also advocates.

Secretary-General awarded Seoul Peace Prize

12 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is “deeply honoured” over his selection as the 2012 winner of the Seoul Peace Prize, according to his spokesperson.

“The Secretary-General regards this award as a recognition of the efforts of the United Nations and humbly accepts the 2012 Seoul Peace Prize on behalf of the United Nations,” his spokesperson said in a statement issued overnight.

The award’s Selection Committee officially announced its decision early Tuesday. The Secretary-General was reportedly selected for his efforts in promoting the rights of women and children, tackling poverty in developing countries, and contributing to the democratisation of Middle Eastern countries.



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. UN Photo/Mark Garten

According to its website, the Seoul Peace Prize was established in 1990 to commemorate the success of the 24th Olympic Games held in Seoul.

“The significance of the Seoul Olympic Games rests in the fact that the games heralded the termination of age-old political and ideological conflict between the East and the West, fostering a worldwide atmosphere of peace and reconciliation,” the website states. “It also served as an occasion to confirm the possibility of achieving world peace through mutual understanding and cooperation.”

In his statement, the UN chief’s spokesperson noted that, as stated in the announcement by the Prize Selection Committee, the international community faces a greater array of daunting challenges and more pressing concerns than ever before.

“Addressing these multiple crises requires renewed, strengthened multilateralism in which all international actors participate actively with a strong sense of ownership and in greater partnership,” the spokesperson said. “At the epicentre of this multilateralism, the United Nations is carrying out its life-saving activities around the world.”

“The Secretary-General renews his commitment to continuing to exert his utmost efforts to respond to the need for peace, human rights and development of the world’s people,” he added.

Past awardees of the Seoul Peace Prize include former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in 2010, and former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ogata Sadako, in 2000.

Security Council calls on Yemenis to reject violence, proceed with peaceful transition



Security Council in session. UN
Photo/Ryan Brown

12 June - The Security Council today called on all sides in Yemen to immediately reject the use of violence to achieve political goals, and demanded the cessation of all actions aimed at undermining the Government of National Unity and the ongoing political transition.

In a unanimously adopted resolution, the 15-member body expressed its readiness “to consider further measures,” including under Article 41 of the UN Charter, if actions such as attacks on oil, gas and electricity infrastructure continue, as well as interference with the decisions relating to the restructuring of the armed and security forces and obstruction of decrees on military and civilian appointments.

Article 41 falls under Chapter VII of the Charter, and deals with threats to peace, breaches of peace and acts of aggression. It states that the Council may decide what measures – not involving the use of armed force – are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call on Member States to apply such measures.

These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.

Yemen has been undergoing a democratic transition, under the leadership of President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour, who came to power in February’s election. This followed an agreement signed by warring factions in November 2011 on a transitional settlement in the wake of widespread protests similar to those seen across the Middle East and North Africa, and the resignation of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

An important element of the transition is the all-inclusive dialogue, scheduled to take place later this year, and whose outcome will feed into the constitution-making process that is to conclude in late 2013, enabling general elections to take place in February 2014.

In its resolution, the Council emphasized the importance of conducting a “fully-inclusive, participatory, transparent and meaningful” national dialogue conference, including with youth and women’s groups and called on all stakeholders to participate in this process.

In addition to the convening of the national dialogue conference, the Council noted that the second phase of the transition process should also focus on restructuring the security and armed forces under a unified professional national leadership structure, and the ending of all armed conflicts; steps to address transitional justice and to support national reconciliation; and, constitutional and electoral reform and the holding of general elections by February 2014.

The Council also reminded the Yemeni Government and other actors of the need to release immediately those protesters unlawfully detained during the crisis, and urged the Government to pass legislation on transitional justice to support reconciliation, without further delay.

Syria among 52 perpetrators of grave violations against children – UN report

12 June - The United Nations has named 52 parties on its annual ‘list of shame’ of those who recruit and use children, kill and maim, commit sexual violence or attack schools and hospitals, including four new parties in Sudan, Yemen and Syria.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s yearly report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict gives an overview of the grave violations committed against girls and boys in conflict zones, the main perpetrators as well as measures taken for the protection of children.

“2011 shows a mixed picture,” said the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy.

“While new crises erupted with a heavy toll on children such as in Syria, and also in Libya, violations against girls and boys have come to an end in other parts of the world,” she noted.

Children in Syria – where more than 10,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began some 16 months ago – were victims of killing and maiming, arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence, by the Syrian armed forces, the intelligence forces, and the Shabiha militia.

Young people between 8 and 13 were forcibly taken from their homes and used by soldiers as human shields, placing them in front of the windows of buses carrying military personnel into the raid on villages, according to a news release issued by the Special Representative’s office. Schools have been regularly raided, used as military bases and detention centres.

In detention, girls and boys were beaten, blindfolded, subjected to stress positions and to electrical shocks, as well as whipped with heavy electrical cables.

“The world is keeping a detailed account of the violence committed against civilians in Syria and I am confident that these crimes will not go unpunished,” said Ms. Coomaraswamy.

A worrisome trend is the growing use of children as suicide bombers and “victim” bombers – those who do not know that they are carrying explosives and are detonated from distance. In 2011 alone, at least 11 children in Afghanistan and another 11 girls and boys in Pakistan were killed while conducting suicide attacks, some as young as eight years old.

“The world should unite against this inhuman and perverse practice of child suicide bombers,” the Special Representative said.

Meanwhile, the report notes that parties to conflict in Nepal and Sri Lanka have been de-listed after their successful completion of Security Council-mandated action plans to end the recruitment and use of children.

In 2011, five more parties in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad and South Sudan entered into similar agreements with the UN. Also in 2011, releases of children associated with armed forces and armed groups have taken place in CAR, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, South Sudan and Sudan.

“The progress is continuous but the list of parties to conflict who harm girls and boys will always be too long,” Ms. Coomaraswamy said.

The report for the first time ever, thanks to a Security Council resolution adopted last year, lists parties responsible for attacks on schools and hospitals in addition to those who recruit, kill and maim, or commit sexual violence.



Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Radhika Coomaraswamy. UN Photo

They include armed groups in Afghanistan, DRC and Iraq, as well as the Syrian Government forces who regularly shell, burn, loot and raid schools, as well as assault or threaten teachers, students, and medical personnel.

Ms. Coomaraswamy called for stronger action against the growing list of persistent perpetrators of grave violations against children – those who have been listed for at least five years – which has doubled since last year to 32.

“We must put more pressure on these parties through sanctions, other Security Council action, and closer collaboration with national and international courts,” she stated.