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## **Over \$8 billion pledged for Africa's Sahel region as global leaders begin UN-led visit**



A field of withered crops in Mali's Kayes region. Photo: WFP/Daouda Guirou

**4 November** - Global leaders have pledged over \$8 billion to boost economic growth in the Sahel region of West Africa as they begin a United Nations-led visit to an area that has suffered for decades from devastating poverty, hunger and instability.

"The challenges in the Sahel respect no borders – neither should our solutions. The cycle of crises can be broken," said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who arrives in Bamako, Mali, today with other development leaders.

The Sahel has suffered three major droughts in less than a decade. More than 11 million people are at risk of hunger and 5 million children under five are at risk of acute malnutrition. In addition, political instability and unconstitutional changes in Governments have had significant economic and social consequences in the region and terrorist acts, as well as organized crime, have threatened the region's stability.

"By working together and investing in governance, security, resilience and opportunity for women and young people, we can help the Sahel move from fragility to sustainability," said Mr. Ban. "Fighting fires in the Sahel remains crucial, but we also need to clear away problems that ignite conflict and instability."

The World Bank Group has pledged \$1.5 billion in new regional investments over the next two years, in addition to significant country programmes, while the European Union (EU) has announced it will provide €5 billion (\$6.75 billion) to six countries over the next seven years.



“The people of the Sahel region desperately need more secure living standards, and our hope is this funding helps build a new path for economic growth in the region,” said World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim.

“For too long, the people of the Sahel, especially women, have struggled with the devastating impact of too little economic growth and opportunity, a harsh climate, hunger, high fertility rates and the world’s highest number of maternal and child deaths.”

The announcements come as the leaders begin a historic trip to Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad to discuss peace, security and resilience in the region. It is the second joint visit by the heads of the UN and the World Bank to Africa in six months.

In May, Mr. Ban and Dr. Kim travelled to the Great Lakes region, drawing attention to the same issue of promoting both peace and development. During that trip, Dr. Kim pledged \$1 billion for regional projects to improve health, education, nutrition, access to energy and job training.

Also making the current trip are Andris Piebalgs, EU Commissioner for Development; African Union Commission Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma; and African Development Bank President Donald Kaberuka.

The World Bank’s pledges for the next two years will support major regional development priorities such as social safety nets to help families weather the worst effects of economic adversity and natural disasters, improve infrastructure and create opportunities in rural areas.

The funding will also create more hydropower and other sources of clean energy to greatly expand irrigation and transform agriculture; protect and expand herding for more than 80 million people living in the Sahel who rely on it as a major source of food and livelihoods; expand health services for women and girls; and improve regional communications and connectivity between countries, among other goals.

The EU’s support to Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Chad (subject to approval by the European Parliament and the European Council) will aim to help those countries tackle the specific and complex challenges of the Sahel region: security and stability, development and resilience to crises.

Governance, rule of law and security, delivery of social services, agriculture and food security, as well as regional trade and integration will be at the heart of the development programmes from 2014 to 2020.

“The Sahel is a priority for the European Union where it mobilizes all its instruments to address a complex situation,” said Mr. Piebalgs. “We are determined to continue and increase our support to both the States and people of the Sahel. Our approach is built on the principle that security is a pre-requisite for growth – there can be no development without it.”

## Senior UN official brokers accord to allow medical aid, supplies to northern Yemen

**4 November** - A senior United Nations official in Yemen has helped to broker an agreement to allow in medical and other supplies, and to evacuate the wounded from the northern part of the country, which has experience escalating violence, it was announced today.

A UN spokesperson told journalists in New York that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will be able to access Dammaj – a town in the northern governorate of Sa’ada – due to negotiations led by the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Yemen, Jamal Benom.

Dammaj has been the centre of clashes between Houthi and Salafi armed groups for the past several weeks, which has recently escalated, resulting in dozens killed and injured.



Children in Dammaj village, northern Yemen, are cut off from food and healthcare. Photo: IRIN

“Mr. Benomar has pressed all concerned to implement an immediate cease-fire and to allow unfettered humanitarian access into the area,” the UN spokesperson said.

The UN official has been closely following the conflict in and around Dammaj, and he has been in close communication with President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Minister of Defence Mohammed Nasser Ahmed, and Houthi and Salafi leaders.

He also has urged them to resolve their differences through peaceful dialogue to reach a sustainable solution to the conflict in the area.

Yemen has been undergoing a democratic transition, with a Government of National Unity, which came to power in an election in February 2012 following protests that led to the resignation of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

In addition, the security situation remains volatile in parts of the country, and Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) remains a major threat, according to a briefing Mr. Benom gave to the Security Council last month.

Currently some 13 million people – more than half the entire population – require some form of humanitarian aid.

In addition, child malnutrition rates are among the highest in the world with close to half of Yemen’s children under five years – two million children – stunted and one million acutely malnourished.

## UN agrees to launch collective development response to Syrian crisis



Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States at the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Sima Bahous. Photo: UNDP/Dylan Lowthian

**4 November** - Senior United Nations development officials have agreed to complement ongoing humanitarian efforts in Syria and its neighbours with support for increased demands on basic services and to help the countries recover from economic downturns.

“While we continue to provide essential humanitarian support, we must as well attend to development needs in a manner that is complementary, simultaneous and urgent,” stressed Sima Bahous, Chair of the Regional UN Development Group, which is hosting the two-day meeting.

“We must safeguard present gains in development and arrest potential roll-back, and at the same time, strengthen recovery and nurture innate capacities for development planning and delivery, so that people –supported by their local institutions— can cope with the ongoing crisis and build back their lives, better,” added Ms. Bahous, who is also the Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States at the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

Regional directors and representatives of more than 20 UN agencies, including UNDP, have been meeting in the Jordanian capital of Amman since Saturday to discuss means to harmonize UN responses to the conflict which has killed more than 100,000 people and forced millions to flee their homes within Syria and into neighbouring countries.

Almost 97 per cent of Syria's refugees are hosted in the immediate surrounding region, with around one million in Lebanon, followed by Jordan, Iraq and Turkey.

“The spillover of the crisis into its four neighbouring countries is impacting economic and human development outcomes in those countries at the national and local levels,” UNDP has said.

Key sectors including investment, tourism, trade and local production are affected at varying levels of intensity, according to the UN agency. The crisis also is raising concerns over possibilities of triggering tensions between refugees and local populations in those countries.

The outcome response plan has three main aspects. The first, to support governmental efforts at national and sub-national

levels to ensure the provision of quality housing and related services, such as water, sanitation, energy and waste removal, and to rehabilitate and reconstruct the social economic infrastructure.

The agencies will also strengthen technical and managerial capacities of municipal governments. That includes, according to UNDP, promoting peaceful coexistence within conflict-affected communities.

Turning to livelihood opportunities and sustainable employment, the plan will focus on improving access to markets and financial services, stimulating productive investments, and formulating pro-poor policies to promote private sector engagement.

The Regional UN Development Group also agreed to support development inside Syria, by addressing root causes of the conflict and restoring basic services, where possible, in areas of relative peace, and provide support to livelihood activities.

The UN agencies also explored means to optimize partnerships and funding mechanisms between national and local authorities and amongst donors, international cooperation agencies and the Organization in order to support the proposed resilience-based development response.

“Today, we have made an excellent start on a long journey,” said Gustavo Gonzalez, Sub-regional Coordinator of the Development Response. “As of today, we are rolling our sleeves up.”

## UN labour agency urges new job-centred approach to tackle Portugal’s economic crisis

**4 November** - Portugal is facing the most critical economic and social crisis in its recent history, the United Nations labour agency today reported, calling for a new job-centred approach to the crisis.

“Much of the policy action so far has focused on reducing fiscal deficits and boosting competitiveness,” says Raymond Torres, head of the UN International Labour Agency’s (ILO) Research Department.

“Cuts in wages and welfare programmes, combined with tax increases, have eroded family incomes and domestic demand,” added Mr. Torres. “Small- and medium-sized enterprises struggle to find credit, which means lost opportunities for job creation.”

Since the start of the global crisis in 2008, one in seven jobs have been lost in the country, two-thirds of those in the past two years, according to “Tackling the job crisis in Portugal” released today by the ILO.

A large part of this deterioration occurred since the start of the financial assistance programme in 2011, with young workers and families with small children disproportionately affected.

The report describes the socio-economic situation in the country as “critical,” marked by unprecedented levels of unemployment, a drastic decline of productive investment and an economic recovery that is likely to be too weak to make a significant dent in the jobless figures

The report findings are being discussed today at a high-level ILO conference in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon.

Among its recommendations, the report highlights improved credit conditions for viable small firms.

“The establishment of a Eurozone ‘banking union’ would trigger a move towards sustainable investments and job recovery,” the report authors wrote.

Another suggestion is for promotion of apprenticeships, work experience and internships, and establishment of new



Head of the UN International Labour Agency’s (ILO) Research Department Raymond Torres (right). Photo: ILO

partnerships between educational institutions, enterprises, worker representatives and young people themselves.

“Some of these policies will cost the public purse, but they would be short-term and would kick-start the job recovery process,” said Mr. Torres.

“The ILO can provide technical expertise to help the Portuguese government and its social partners put in place programmes that are suitable to their specific needs.”

## UN expert group cites need for global instrument regulating private security companies

**4 November** - The United Nations Working Group on the use of mercenaries today urged Governments to recognize the need for a legally binding international agreement to regulate the use and activities of private military and security companies (PMSCs) to complement existing regulations.

“Providing security is a fundamental human right and a fundamental responsibility of the State,” Anton Katz, who currently chairs the five-member group of independent experts, said in a news release.

“But the ever expanding activities of PMSCs continue to raise a number of challenges, and the outsourcing of security to these companies by States create risks for human rights, hence the need to regulate their activities.”

Presenting the group’s report to the General Assembly’s Third Committee, which examines human rights issues, Mr. Katz stressed that existing national legislation is not sufficient to address the challenges posed by PMSCs.

He cited inadequacies related registering and licensing, and the lack of effective and transparent mechanisms and remedies for human rights violations within existing legislation, adding that these limitations are worsened by the transnational nature of PMSCs and the difficulties in ensuring accountability for any violations that may occur.

He noted that there are self-regulatory initiatives such as the Montreux Document and the International Code of Conduct which have been established by a number of States and corporate actors in the past years to try and address the challenges posed by PMSCs.

“However, these initiatives are not legally binding and cannot be considered as complete solutions for the problems concerning PMSCs,” he stressed.

On mercenaries, Mr. Katz said that recent events in several parts of the world demonstrate that mercenaries remain a threat not only to security but also to human rights and the right of peoples to self-determination. “We continue to call on States to cooperate in eliminating this phenomenon,” he stated.

Over the past year, the group made two country visits, to Somalia and Honduras. It also launched a national legislation project to look into analysing good practices and possible shortcomings in States’ protection of human rights in transnational security-related activities.

It has also embarked on a study on the UN’s use of PMSCs which will be the focus of its report to the General Assembly in 2014.

Members of the Working Group are appointed by the Human Rights Council. Their positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.



Chairman-Rapporteur of the five-member UN Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries Anton Katz. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

## Libya: UN mission condemns spate of assassination attempts in Benghazi



A young displaced girl plays outside her new home in Benghazi, a bungalow in a former company compound. Photo: UNHCR/ L. Dobbs

**4 November** - The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) today strongly condemned the series of assassinations in Benghazi targeting security and military officials as well as political activists and other citizens.

“UNSMIL emphasizes the need for intensified efforts by the Government and the citizens to confront these heinous crimes by taking practical and swift steps to address its devastating impact on peace and security as well as the safety of the people of Benghazi,” the Mission said in a statement issued from Tripoli.

“The Mission calls on the Libyan authorities to give this matter the priority it deserves to ensure the appropriate conditions to accomplish the democratic transition in Libya,” the

statement concluded.

## Attacks against polling stations in Kosovo 'utterly deplorable', says UN official

**3 November** - A senior United Nations official strongly condemned attacks against polling stations in northern Kosovo where municipal elections were taking place, and called on local and international authorities to establish order in the area.

“The attacks this evening against polling stations in northern Kosovo are utterly deplorable,” said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo, Farid Zarif.

Following the recent wave of violence during the election process, several polling stations in northern Kosovo were vandalised and individuals present were attacked.

Mr. Zarif strongly and categorically condemned “these uncivilized and criminal actions” and noted that they aimed to undermine the elections process through preventing the population from exercising their democratic right to vote.

“These destructive acts of hooliganism have no place in civilized and democratic societies and their perpetrators must be urgently held to account,” the Special Representative added.

Mr. Zarif urged all people involved with the Kosovo elections to remain calm, and for all residents to respect the democratic process and cooperate with local and international law enforcement.

On the eve of the elections, the UN Mission in Kosovo, which Mr. Zarif heads, strongly condemned attacks on at least two of the more than 8,000 candidates vying for positions in the city council and as mayors.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had urged respect for diversity and wide participation in the polls, saying they would constitute a milestone in the strengthening of peace and security in Kosovo.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in February 2008 following years of ethnic tensions, but Serbia has not recognized the declaration. The European Union has since been facilitating dialogue between the parties on a range of practical matters.

Tensions between ethnic Serbs and ethnic Albanians have flared up over the years, particularly in the north of Kosovo – which has an ethnic Serbian majority, unlike the rest of Kosovo, where ethnic Albanians are the majority – sparking



Special Representative Farid Zarif. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

concerns from UN officials.

Plans for the elections were part of the landmark agreement between Belgrade and Pristina initialed in Brussels under the auspices of the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton.

## Security Council, UNESCO strongly condemn killing of French journalists in Mali



Security Council voting to approve a 12,600-strong UN peacekeeping operation to take over from the African-led mission in Mali on 1 July 2013. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

**3 November** - The Security Council and the United Nations agency tasked with defending press freedom have strongly condemned the kidnapping and assassinations of two French journalists in northern Mali, and called on the Government to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Armed gunmen kidnapped and executed Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon yesterday near the city of Kidal.

The Director-General of the UN Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Irina Bokova, called the killings “a heinous crime that stands condemned by the whole world.”

The bodies of the journalists, on assignment for Radio France International (RFI), were found by French military forces shortly after riddled with bullets, according to the Paris-based agency.

In a statement today, Ms. Bokova, who visited northern Mali last February, said Ms. Dupont and Mr. Verlon “paid the highest possible price for doing their job; for defending freedom of expression and people's right to information; for contributing –through their reporting – to Mali's struggle against violence and extremism, and its efforts to rebuild.”

Late last night, the 15-member Security Council expressed its condolences to the families of the victims, as well as the French Government.

“In accordance with international humanitarian law, journalists, media professionals and associated personnel engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict are generally considered as civilians and shall be respected and protected as such,” the statement reiterated.

The Council members demanded that “all parties to an armed conflict comply fully with the obligations applicable to them under international humanitarian law, including as related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict.”

They called on the Government of Mali to “swiftly investigate the case” and to hold those responsible to account.

In its statement, the Council also reaffirmed that any acts of terrorism are “criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed”.

The Members also reiterated their full support to the UN Mission in Mali and the French forces, and called on all parties to cooperate fully with the Mission.

The Security Council set up the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in April to support the West African country's recovery from a coup and the occupation of its north by Islamist fundamentalists, its transition back to stability and democratic governance, and the promotion of human rights and provision of humanitarian aid.

Ms. Dupont and Mr. Verlon are the first journalists killed in Mali this year, and are remembered on the dedicated webpage, UNESCO Condemns Killing of Journalists.

## Kosovo: UN mission strongly condemns violence related to upcoming elections

**2 November** - On the eve of municipal elections in Kosovo, the United Nations mission there said that police and international security are undertaking all necessary measures to ensure a safe election period following attacks at least two of the candidates.

“UNMIK (UN Mission in Kosovo) strongly condemns the recent violence against figures involved in the election process,” a spokesperson said, adding that while the nature of their cause is still being investigated, “such attacks must be condemned by all.”

The democratic process demands an environment free of violence and intimidation, the Mission stressed.

“Any attempts to influence political developments by these means will fail, and only discredit those who might encourage or engage in such behaviour to forward a particular viewpoint,” it underscored.

The polls are due to open tomorrow morning in Kosovo, which declared its independence from Serbia in February 2008 following years of ethnic tensions, but which Serbia has not recognized.

More than 8,000 candidates vying for positions in the city council and as mayors.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for a respect for diversity and wide participation in the elections.

“Free and fair elections this Sunday will constitute a milestone in the strengthening of peace and security in Kosovo,” he said in a statement issued yesterday.

Plans for the elections were part of the landmark agreement between Belgrade and Pristina initialed in Brussels under the auspices of the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton.



E.U. High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, brokered landmark agreement between Serbia and Kosovo reached on 19 April 2013 in Brussels. Photo: European Union 2013 - European Parliament

## Syria and neighbours need urgent development response, UN officials tell conference



Three Syrian refugee children explore the new camp at Darashakran in northern Iraq. Photo: UNHCR/L. Veide

**2 November** - The crisis in Syria urgently requires a robust development response to complement ongoing humanitarian and refugee efforts in the region, senior United Nations officials today said at the start of a meeting in Jordan.

“A comprehensive development response to complement our humanitarian efforts in Syria and its neighbours is overdue. We are determined to change that,” said Sima Bahous, Chair of the Regional UN Development Group, which is hosting the meeting, and Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States at the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

The meeting of the Regional UN Development Group, which started today and will continue over two days, is expected to conclude with a plan focused on development in Syria and its immediate sub-regional context and how to put that response to action, according to a UNDP news release.

Regional directors and representatives of more than 20 UN agencies, including UNDP, are in the Jordanian's capital of Amman to discuss means to harmonize UN responses to the conflict which has killed more than 100,000 people and forced millions to flee their homes within Syria and into neighbouring countries.

Almost 97 per cent of Syria's refugees are hosted in the immediate surrounding region, with around one million in Lebanon, followed by Jordan, Iraq and Turkey.

“The spillover of the crisis into its four neighboring countries is impacting economic and human development outcomes in those countries at the national and local levels,” UNDP said in a news release.

Key sectors including investment, tourism, trade and local production are affected at varying levels of intensity, according to the UN agency. The crisis also is raising concerns over possibilities of triggering tensions between refugees and local populations in those countries.

Recent impact assessments in the two countries most affected by the crisis - Lebanon and Jordan - raise concerns that the crisis may be seriously compounding the deterioration of their economies, which were already under stress, with direct impact on incomes and poverty levels especially among the most vulnerable populations.

A joint World Bank-UN assessment in Lebanon estimates that over the period of 2012- 2014, the Syrian conflict may cut real GDP growth by 2.9 percentage points annually, leading to a cumulative loss in wages, profits, taxes and investment of up to \$7.5 billion.

The number of Lebanese who are living in extreme poverty could rise from 1 million to 1.17 million and the unemployment rate could double to above 20 percent.

According to UNDP, official assessments in Jordan indicate that the Government has incurred over \$251 million during 2012 to provide and maintain services and basic needs of Syrian refugees and estimate that additional costs needed to continue hosting them may reach \$1.68 billion, excluding the additional costs for the camps.

This burden has stifled efforts to recover economic growth in the Jordan from 8.15 per cent in 2005 to 2.3 per cent in 2010. According to the cited figures, the national unemployment rate rose to 13.1 per cent from 12.7 per cent.

## DR Congo: UN envoys note M23's announced cessation of hostilities



Special Representative Martin Kobler thanks a peacekeeper from the MONUSCO Intervention Brigade for its role in the liberation of areas occupied by M23 rebels in North Kivu, DRC. Photo: MONUSCO/Sy Koumbo Singa Gali

**4 November** - A team of special envoys led by the United Nations today noted the announced cessation of hostilities between the M23 rebel group and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

In a joint statement, the team, led by Mary Robinson, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to the Great Lakes Region, said they were concerned about the renewed outbreak of violence and that the announced cessation is a “first and necessary step to peace.”

They called on the M23 to renounce its rebellion as already agreed. The Envoys further called upon the Government of the DRC to restrain from further military action at this stage.

The team includes Martin Kobler, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in the DRC and the head of the UN mission there known by its French acronym, MONUSCO.

In addition, Boubacar Diarra, African Union Special Representative for the Great Lakes, Russell Feingold, United States Special Envoy for the Great Lakes and the DRC, and Koen Vervaeke, European Union Senior Coordinator to the Great Lakes Region.

Talks between the M23 and the Government are being held in Kampala, Uganda, under the auspices of the Chairperson of the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, the Mediator, as well as Ugandan Defence Minister and Facilitator, Crispus Kiyonga.

The Envoys urged both parties to remain committed to seeing the political process through to a final and principled agreement that ensures the disarmament and demobilization of the M23 and accountability for human rights abuses.

Meanwhile, South African President Jacob Zuma is today hosting leaders from the 15-country Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and some of DRC's neighbours in the capital of Pretoria.

Mrs. Robinson and the Envoys noted that the joint ICGLR-SADC presents an "important opportunity" to build consensus on ending the immediate security crisis and for moving forward with full implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement.

The 11-nation Agreement was signed earlier this year under UN auspices as a comprehensive approach to sustainable peace in the region.