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## **Ban welcomes appointment of new Palestinian Prime Minister**



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (left) with Prime Minister Salam Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority, who has been succeeded by Rami Hamdallah. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

**6 June** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today congratulated Rami Hamdallah on his appointment as the new Prime Minister of Palestine and welcomed the formation of a new sworn-in Cabinet.

In a statement on behalf of his spokesperson, Secretary-General Ban wished Mr. Hamdallah success in his critical work ahead.

“The United Nations looks forward to continuing to work with the Government of Palestine and President Abbas in support of the State-building agenda and ongoing efforts aimed at a resumption of crucial and meaningful peace negotiations to achieve the two-State solution,” according to the statement, which makes reference to the internationally endorsed plan for both Israel and Palestine to live side by side in peace within secure borders.

Mr. Ban has said the UN will do all it can to help resume a meaningful peace process in the region.

President Mahmoud Abbas named Mr. Hamdallah to replace the outgoing Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, who stepped down in April.

Mr. Ban expressed his appreciation for the Mr. Fayyad's “many contributions”, especially his commitment to readying Palestinian institutions for statehood.

## Security Council, senior UN official urge support, patience as Somalia turns new page

**6 June** - While welcoming recent progress in Somalia, the Security Council today recognized that gains in security and other sectors 'remain fragile' and urged the international community to support the efforts of the Somali Government to tackle outstanding issues vital for the country's long-term stability.

In a statement adopted at a meeting on Somalia chaired by Mark Simmonds, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, which holds the Council's presidency for the month, the 15-member body underlined the importance of international support to the Somali Federal Government in building a professional, accountable and capable security force as part of a comprehensive approach to security sector reform.

The Council also reiterated the importance of the Government addressing outstanding issues, such as political reconciliation, development of a federal system, the constitutional review and subsequent referendum process, and preparations for elections in 2016. The Council also reiterated its call for the full inclusion of women in all political process.

Members of the Council emphasized the need for the international community to provide well coordinated, timely and sustained humanitarian assistance "to the millions of Somalis who remain in urgent need of lifesaving support; and development assistance with a focus on livelihood recovery and building community resilience to support [the country's] transition to sustainable peace and economic development."

In his briefing to the Council, UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson echoed many of those sentiments, as he stressed that dialogue among all Somali partners and continuous support from the international community are the only way to ensure unity and a sound federal structure in the long-troubled country.

"Realizing a federal State in Somalia is a complex and demanding task," he said, adding: "[Issues] related to the unity and federalism of Somalia can only be resolved through dialogue among the Somalis themselves. This requires patience and pragmatism on all sides."

Somalia has been torn asunder by factional fighting since 1991 but has recently made progress towards stability. In 2011, Islamist Al-Shabaab insurgents retreated from Mogadishu and last year new Government institutions emerged, as the country ended a transitional phase toward setting up a permanent, democratically-elected Government.

"Eight months since its formation, the Federal Government of Somalia has established its political programme and presented plans for stabilization and peace-building," Mr. Eliasson noted, but added that recent tensions in Kismayo following the declaration of a regional state in April must be addressed immediately to sustain progress.

On 15 May, 500 delegates to a conference in Kismayo selected a president of what was called 'Jubaland State of Somalia', which the Government regards as unconstitutional. Since then, six other candidates have declared themselves president of the new entity.

"While there have so far been no reports of military confrontation, the situation remains volatile," Mr. Eliasson said, adding that Somalia will need the support of its partners and neighbours to maintain stability the country.

"There is agreement that a strong and stable Somalia is in the interests of all. This recognition should guide regional efforts to address outstanding issues and potential sources of friction."

Mr. Eliasson said the recently established UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) would help the Government meet this challenge by supporting political dialogue, peacebuilding and the protection of human rights.



A policeman directs traffic at a checkpoint in downtown Mogadishu, Somalia. UN Photo/Tobin Jones

“UNSOM has already set up its Headquarters in Mogadishu and will establish its presence across the country, notably in areas recovered from Al-Shabaab, as well as in Garowe and Hargeisa,” he said. “UNSOM will be an integrated Mission, offering ‘one door to knock on’ for Somalia’s engagement with the United Nations.”

He also highlighted the need for both UNSOM and the Government to work jointly with the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) to ensure security and freedom of movement in the region.

Created in 2007, AMISOM conducts peace support operations in Somalia to stabilize the situation in the country to create conditions for the conduct of humanitarian activities.

“As in so many countries across the continent, partnership of the UN with the African Union is vital to reaching our objectives in Somalia,” he said.

“With the deployment of UNSOM, we will work together on political strategy, peace-building and stabilization, as well as protection of human rights. The new Mission’s impact will also depend on effective security arrangements in close collaboration with AMISOM,” Mr. Eliasson added, and called on the Council to ensure AMISOM has the necessary resources to carry out its operations.

Mr. Eliasson underlined that over the long-term, Somalia must assume its own responsibilities through accountable and effective security institutions.

“This requires a well-funded and coordinated strategic approach,” he said, welcoming the recent pledges of support of more than \$300 million which made at the London Conference on Somalia in May.

“Somalia will require sustained and generous international support to continue on the path of progress. This means a clear commitment to the Federal Government to rapidly develop its plans and build its capacities,” he added.

The Deputy Secretary-General reiterated the UN’s engagement in the country in its new phase, and called on the Council to provide its full support to UNSOM, as well as resources so that the Mission can carry out its mandate.

“I call on all to come together in support of the new Government in its efforts to bring peace and stability to the people of Somalia. The Secretary-General and I firmly believe that with the continuous support and firm commitment of its partners, Somalia can achieve its vision: a country in unity and at peace with itself and its neighbours, living under the rule of law, and on the path to economic stability and decent living conditions for all.

## Ban regrets Austria’s decision to withdraw troops from UN mission in Golan Heights



A UNDOF base in Golan Heights. Photo: UNDOF

**6 June** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today he regrets Austria’s decision to withdraw its troops from the United Nations peacekeeping force in the Golan Heights, which has faced a number of security risks and operational challenges in recent months amid the escalating conflict in Syria.

Austria is one of three countries – along with India and the Philippines – that contribute military personnel to the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which monitors the 1974 disengagement accord between Syria and Israel after their 1973 war.

“Austria has been a backbone of the mission and their withdrawal will affect the mission’s operational capacity,” UN spokesperson Martin Nesirky told reporters in New York. “We are in discussions with them about the timing of the withdrawal, and with other troop-contributing countries to provide replacement troops.”

Austria reportedly cited a lack of freedom of movement and an unacceptable level of danger to its soldiers in deciding to withdraw. Since last November, UNDOF has had its peacekeepers seized by armed groups, its observation posts attacked and looted, and its freedom of movement curtailed.

Mr. Ban, in a statement issued by his spokesperson, noted Austria's "longstanding and valuable" contribution to UNDOF, and expressed his gratitude to those countries who are continuing to provide troops and military observers to the mission.

"He calls on all parties to respect UNDOF's freedom of movement and safety and security."

Mr. Ban also condemned the attack which injured two UNDOF peacekeepers today. Both are reported to be in stable condition after sustaining minor injuries after mortar rounds impacted in Camp Ziouani. This comes amid intense fighting between anti-Government elements and Syrian forces within the area of separation in the vicinity of Al Qataniyah and Al Qunaytirah.

The Secretary-General underlined that any military activity in the area of separation has the potential to escalate tensions between Israel and Syria and to jeopardize the long-held ceasefire between the two countries.

"The Secretary-General stresses once again that all concerned in the region must abide by international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, and calls on all to work for de-escalation of violence. He urges parties to strictly respect the disengagement agreement, to stop fighting in the area of separation and to refrain from any violation of the disengagement line."

Mr. Ban also noted that the Syria crisis, which has claimed more than 70,000 lives since fighting between the Government and opposition forces seeking to oust President Bashar Al-Assad began in March 2011, is having an increasingly destabilizing impact beyond its borders.

"The Secretary-General is gravely concerned about the growing regional ramifications of the conflict. He calls on all parties to move swiftly toward a political solution that is the only way to end the violence and the terrible suffering of the Syrian people."

## Food prices to stay high as productions dips, UN agency reports in 10-year outlook



Buying food at the market. Photo: World Bank/Curt Carnemark

**6 June** - Agricultural production is expected to slow down over the next decade, due largely to limited expansion of arable land, rising production costs, environmental pressures and resource constraints, the United Nations food agency said today, launching in Beijing its report on the global agricultural outlook.

"Although relatively resilient to economic downturns, the agricultural markets continue to reflect the impact of a two speed global economy with weak recovery in developed countries and vibrant growth in many developing countries," the authors reported in the 'Agricultural Outlook, 2013-2022' produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization

(FAO).

This year's report contains a special feature on the future of agriculture in China, whose agricultural output rose 4.5 times since 1980. With one-fifth of the world's population, comparably little agricultural land and water resources, China's focus on food security and self-sufficiency have allowed it to improve access to food.

In Beijing, OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría and FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva participated in the report's launch. The event was hosted by the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and is part of a two-day international forum.

"High food prices are an incentive to increase production and we need to do our best to ensure that poor farmers benefit from them," said Mr. Graziano da Silva. "Let's not forget that 70 per cent of the world's food insecure population lives in rural areas of developing countries and that many of them are small-scale and subsistence farmers themselves."

He added: "China's agricultural production has been tremendously successful. Since 1978, the volume of agricultural

production has grown almost five fold and the country has made significant progress towards food security. China is on track to achieving the first millennium development goal of hunger reduction.”

According to the report, global agricultural production for crop sectors and livestock production reviewed is projected to grow on average 1.5 per cent annually, compared to 2.1 per cent in the previous decade.

“These trends reflect rising costs, growing resource constraints, and increasing environmental pressures, which are anticipated to inhibit supply response in virtually all regions,” OECD and FAO said.

Mr. Gurría said that the “relatively bright” picture – strong demand, expanding trade and high prices – assumes continuing economic recovery. “If we fail to turn the global economy around, investment and growth in agriculture will suffer and food security may be compromised,” he said.

“Governments need to create the right enabling environment for growth and trade,” he added. “Agricultural reforms have played a key role in China’s remarkable progress in expanding production and improving domestic food security.”

Policy reforms and economic growth across the globe have been changing demand and supply fundamentals sufficiently to turn agriculture into a more market-driven sector which provides investment opportunities, particularly in developing countries.

The report forecasts that developing countries will boost their production growth, particularly economies that have invested in the agricultural sector, and therefore boost their trade growth, particularly exports in coarse grains, rice, oils, sugar, beef, poultry and fish.

Consumption of these goods is also projected to increase, particularly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, followed by Latin America and other parts of Asia. Growing populations have been driving the increase in consumption, but also higher incomes, urbanization and changing diets.

Meanwhile, average prices are expected to be higher for the coming decade than they have been in the previous ten years which included historic highs.

The launch of the report comes one day after World Environment Day, which this year focused on curbing the massive loss and waste inherent in today’s food systems. At least one third of all food produced fails to make it from farm to table, according to FAO which is part of the “Think. Eat. Save: Reduce Your Foodprint” campaign with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and public and private sector partners.

If it continues on the current trajectory, the world will need about 60 per cent more food calories in 2050 compared to 2006.

## **Actress Geena Davis, UN Youth Envoy hold online chat to connect girls and technology**

**6 June** - Information and communications technology (ICTs) have the potential to empower young women and girls across the world and help them engage with their communities, participants at a United Nations online forum said today.

“When we combine technology with young women we are making sure that they are not just empowered but also that they are able to contribute to the development of their society,” the Secretary-General’s Youth Envoy, Ahmad Alhendawi, said during the ‘Innovate Your Future’ online conversation held on the Google+ platform.

Mr. Alhendawi, who has extensive experience working with youth in the Middle East, said women are increasingly turning to technology to tackle complex situations in their countries.



Youth Envoy Ahmad Alhendawi. UN  
Photo/Rick Bajornas

“They use ICTs not just for political change, but to help their communities,” he said, adding that linking online and offline activities is essential to turn ICTs into a transformational development tool.

However, he stressed that ensuring young women have access to ICTs is still a big challenge, particularly in developing countries.

Academy Award-winning actress Geena Davis, who is the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Special Envoy for women and Girls in ICT, pointed out that even when girls have access to ICTs, their representation in media, including online, is inaccurate and does not encourage their engagement with technology.

Research conducted by Ms. Davis’ Institute on Gender and Media found that in family movies produced in the United States – which is a major exporter of entertainment across the world – for every female character in a family movie there are three male characters.

“What kids are seeing is very much bereft of female presence,” Ms. Davis said. “This needs to change. Girls need to be more involved in the production and entrepreneurial nature of this technology explosion [...] and have their status elevated in the culture by seeing themselves represented in more interesting, varied, and non-traditional ways.”

Doreen Bogdan-Martin of the ITU Strategic Planning and membership noted that governments can make a difference by supporting women’s participation in the ICT workforce and encouraging young women to take up careers in the technology sector.

“Governments also are key to enabling access to ICTs,” Ms. Bogdan-Martin said. “Many countries are now including gender in their national broadband plans, promoting access and training women to use ICTs.”

She also pointed out that during a time when youth unemployment in many regions of the world is a concern, there is a steady demand for individuals with ICT skills, and Governments must make young people aware of these opportunities.

The Google+ hangout participants, who also included the Chief Marketing Officer of the online magazine *Mashable*, Stacey Green, and the Chief Marketing Officer of Cisco, Blair Christie, agreed that the issue of young women and ICTs must be directly referenced in the post-2015 agenda, which seeks to build on the anti-poverty goals known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). ICTs, they said, will enable a more progressive and more empowering agenda for young women.

The online conversation, moderated by Gary Fowlie, head of the ITU Strategy and Policy Unit, was part of the Economic and Social Council’s overall “Innovate Your Future” social media campaign on how the world’s youth use science and technology to tackle challenges in their communities.

## Ongoing Israeli restrictions hampering Palestinian employment, economic activity – UN report



Street scene in Gaza. Photo: World Bank/Natalia Cieslik

**6 June** - The United Nations labour agency is calling for lifting restrictions on movement, employment and economic activity in the occupied Arab territories to boost opportunities for decent work and to enable the Palestinian economy to grow.

In its annual report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, which was presented today in Geneva, the International Labour Organization (ILO) cites a number of factors for the fiscal crisis in Palestine.

These include the ongoing failure of donors to meet their commitments, the decision of Israel to suspend, at least temporarily, the payment of clearance revenues, as well as the pace of settlement growth.

“This situation calls for measures by Israel not only to relax the application of restrictions on people and businesses but to

lift them altogether, thus enabling the Palestinian economy to grow and generate decent jobs,” ILO Director-General Guy Ryder says in his preface to the report.

“The continuing occupation and expanding settlement activity are blocking the Palestinian economy, particularly its private sector, from significant progress,” he adds. The current situation will remain unsustainable until it is based on social justice.

According to the ILO, the Palestinian economy is grappling with stagnating growth, higher unemployment and poverty and food dependency. The number of unemployed Palestinians rose by 15.3 per cent between 2011 and 2012, with the unemployment rate reaching 23 per cent.

The situation is “particularly acute” in Gaza, where unemployment has reached 31 per cent and is almost 50 per cent amongst women, the agency said in a news release.

It adds that 18.4 per cent of young Palestinians were neither in the labour force nor in education, including 31.4 per cent of young women. “These bleak indicators point to a clear need to develop large-scale programmes to support the school-to-work transition, such as a youth employment guarantee scheme,” says ILO.

Excessive restrictions, which are economically and socially unproductive, are harming both Palestinian and Israeli business activities and any prospects for growth led by the private sector, it adds.

While last year’s report warned of a dangerous political stalemate, there had still been, at that time, some advances in terms of economic growth, employment, social dialogue and gender equality in the Palestinian labour market, Mr. Ryder says.

“The momentum for growth, already fragile at the time, has now come to a halt, and a fiscal crisis is turning into an economic and social crisis,” he adds.

The report says that any effort to maintain a perceived status quo, in effect, promotes or at least permits “a further dangerous deterioration of the situation.”

“At the very least, nothing should be done to make the situation worse,” says Mr. Ryder. “Denying rightful resources to the Palestinian Authority, stepping up the already unprecedented pace of settlement growth and constraining the Palestinian economy through restrictions and the weight of the settlements, will inevitably destroy any belief in the promise of two States for two peoples.

“Instead,” he states, “together with genuine negotiations, what is needed is action to revive the flagging peace process and restore economic growth.”

The report also points out that work in settlements remains largely unregulated and is open to abuse. The State Comptroller and Ombudsman of Israel had recently criticized the Israeli authorities for slow action in ensuring the inspection of wages, occupational safety and health, and social insurance for all settlement workers, including Palestinians.

“All workers, irrespective of their place and form of employment, must be treated with dignity and respect for their fundamental rights, and must have effective access to remedies in the event of violations,” Mr. Ryder states.

The ILO is currently hosting the 102nd session of the International Labour Conference, which opened on 30 May and runs through 14 June.

## UN outlines actions to help tackle 'double threat' of childhood obesity, undernutrition

**6 June** - The United Nations health agency has issued new guidance to help low- and middle-income countries tackle the emerging double threat of childhood obesity and undernutrition, and halt the growing burden of associated diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 75 per cent of overweight children live in developing countries, with the prevalence in Africa almost doubling in the last 20 years.

Globally, over 100 million children under five years of age are underweight, the agency noted in a news release, while 165 million are stunted – a better indicator of chronic undernutrition. An estimated 35 per cent of all deaths among children under five are associated with undernutrition. At the same time, some 43 million children under five are overweight or obese.

“While it is vital to maintain efforts to reduce undernutrition, the world needs to do much more to prevent and care for the growing numbers of people that are overweight or obese and living in low- and middle-income countries,” says Francesco Branca, Director of WHO’s Department of Nutrition for Health and Development.

Dr. Branca adds that to avoid a massive explosion of nutrition problems in the next generation, policymakers urgently need to give more attention to improving the nutritional status of pregnant women and adolescent girls who will become mothers of the next generation.

To assist countries, WHO presented a package of 24 essential nutrition actions. These include improving nutrition of pregnant and breastfeeding women; encouraging early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months, then continued breastfeeding up to 2 years; and promoting appropriate solid foods for young children.

Focusing on the essential nutrition actions, countries can reduce infant and child mortality, improve growth and development, and improve productivity, the agency stated. Countries such as Brazil, Ethiopia and Peru, as well as India’s second most populous state, Maharashtra, have achieved such successes as a result of implementing these actions.

WHO noted that many of these issues are related to inadequacies in the food system. “A food system that does not deliver a sufficient amount of quality food can lead both to poor growth and to excess weight gain,” it said.

“A child who has grown poorly in his first years of life may turn into a short but overweight adolescent and then later in life, develop chronic disease as an adult.”

## UN envoy in Iraq strongly condemns ambush that leaves 14 dead at fake checkpoint

**6 June** - The top United Nations official in Iraq today condemned “in the strongest terms” the killing of at least 14 border guards and civilians in a “heinous, cold-blooded murder” on a main highway connecting the central cities of Ramadi and Kerbala.

“I urge the security authorities to take swift and decisive action to arrest the perpetrators of this abominable crime and bring them to justice,” the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Martin Kobler, said in a news release from the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) which he heads.



A girl, with her mother in the back, suffering from overweight. Photo: WHO/Marko Kokic



The aftermath of a bombing attack in Iraq (file photo). Photo: IRIN

The gunmen had set up a fake checkpoint in the town of Al-Nukhaib, some 300 km southwest of Ramadi, and apparently opened fire on the policemen when they stopped.

The UN envoy extended his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims as well as to the Iraqi Police.

There were no immediate claims of responsibility for the attack.

The attack comes as UNAMI announced that a total of 1,045 Iraqis were killed and another 2,397 wounded in acts of terrorism and acts of violence in May, making it one of the deadliest months on record.

“That is a sad record,” Mr. Kobler had said. “Iraqi political leaders must act immediately to stop this intolerable bloodshed.”

The figures include 963 civilians and 181 civilian police killed, while 2,191 civilians and 359 civilian police were wounded. An additional 82 members of the Iraqi Security Forces were killed and 206 were injured.

## Human rights violations in occupied Palestinian territory cannot be distorted – UN expert



Special Rapporteur Richard Falk. UN  
Photo/Jess Hoffman

**6 June** - A United Nations independent expert today drew attention to the human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territory and stressed that attempts to distort the facts cannot mask the reality that Israel’s actions are endangering Palestinians’ lives every day.

“Neither Israel nor its proxies can justify the facts on the ground in occupied Palestine,” Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, Richard Falk, said, “so they distract, distort and defame to allow the violations to go on.”

In a news release, Mr. Falk underlined that “irresponsible and dishonest smear campaigns to discredit those who document these realities do not change the facts on the ground 46 after Israel launched the war that began its occupation of Palestine.”

According to Mr. Falk, Israel is actively confiscating Palestinian water and land, having seized an additional 60,000 square meters of land near Nablus just this week.

“Israel continues to annex Palestinian territory; Israel persists in demolishing Palestinians’ homes and populating Palestine with Israeli citizens; Israel maintains a policy of collectively punishing 1.75 million Palestinians through its imposition of a blockade on the Gaza Strip; and Israel prosecutes its occupation with impunity, refusing to accept the world’s calls to respect international law,” he said.

Israel has detained approximately 750,000 Palestinians since the occupation began 46 years ago, equalling nearly 20 per cent of the entire Palestinian population, Mr. Falk said.

“At the end of May Israel had 4,979 Palestinians, including 236 children, in its prisons. Another fact is that Israel constantly holds around 200 Palestinians in so-called administrative detention, which is a euphemism Israel uses for detention without charges.”

Turning to the situation in Gaza, Mr. Falk recalled that, in mid-June, Palestinians in Gaza will enter the seventh year of living under Israel’s blockade.

“Israel’s blockade is suffocating Palestinians in Gaza, with an incredible 70 per cent of the population dependent on international aid for survival and 90 per cent of the water unfit for human consumption,” he said. “These violations deprive Palestinians of hope and make a mockery of revived peace negotiations.”

In his latest report, Mr. Falk describes the situation in Gaza during his visit in December. He is scheduled to present his

findings to the UN Human Rights Council on 10 June.

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 UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

## Civil society organizations must not face reprisals from Russia – UN experts



**6 June** - United Nations independent experts today voiced grave concern over reports that two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been charged by the Russian Government for providing evidence to the UN Committee against Torture.

The Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial in St Petersburg and the Public Verdict Foundation in Moscow were charged in April and May respectively with violating legislation under which NGOs involved in political activity must register as ‘foreign agents’ if they receive money from abroad.

The experts stressed that the charges by Russian prosecutors against the two NGOs are “part of the worrying shift in the legislative environment governing the enjoyment of the freedoms of assembly, association, speech and information.”

According to the Chairperson of the Committee against Torture, Claudio Grossman, and the Committee’s Rapporteur on Reprisals, George Tugushi, the basis of the Government charges were the organizations’ submissions to the Committee in November, the same month the new legislation regarding NGOs was adopted.

The Committee against Torture periodically reviews countries to monitor their implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Punishment.

The Convention, which entered into force 25 years ago, provides that “no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.”

It also obliges States that have ratified the Convention to refrain from deporting or returning people to countries where they would face the risk of torture, and requires ratifying States to extradite or prosecute perpetrators of torture. Under the Convention, victims of the scourge have the right to redress, including compensation.

Mr. Grossman and Mr. Tugushi wrote the Russian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Alexey Borodavkin, seeking urgent clarification and reassurances that Memorial, Public Verdict and other NGOs will not face any reprisals “as a result of their legitimate activities, including providing information to the Committee against Torture.”

The Convention states that “steps shall be taken to ensure that the complainant and witnesses are protected against all ill-treatment or intimidation as a consequence of his complaint or any evidence given.” The experts noted that reprisals would contravene the Convention against Torture, to which Russia is a party.

Various UN officials and Special Rapporteurs have repeatedly expressed concern over the situation faced by NGOs in Russia due to the new legislation. Last year, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay warned that passing the law would have a “seriously negative impact” on human rights in the country, and in May, a group of Special Rapporteurs warned that the law would have “obstructive, intimidating and stigmatizing effects” on NGOs, as it subjects them to an unprecedented wave of inspections and harsh penalties.

## Disaster risk reduction central to post-2015 development process – UN official



Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström. Photo: UNISDR/Thomas Williams

**6 June** - The head of the United Nations office for disaster risk reduction today welcomed the link between poverty reduction and disaster risk reduction emphasized in a key report outlining a new framework to build on the anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The report, compiled by the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, co-chaired by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom, was presented last week to Secretary-General with a focus on assisting the poorest and most marginalized, a disproportionate number of whom are women.

“The report puts reducing disaster risk centre stage in the Post-2015 Development Agenda debate,” said the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), Margareta Wahlström.

The 27-member Panel that wrote the document called for the new post-2015 goals to drive five major transformational shifts, including a transition from “reducing” to “ending” extreme poverty, leaving no one behind; putting sustainable development at the core of the development agenda; and forging a new global partnership based on cooperation, equity and human rights.

In the report, the Panel wrote that “no one is more vulnerable than people in poverty to desertification, deforestation and overfishing, or less able to cope with floods, storms, and droughts. Natural disasters can pull them into a cycle of debt and illness, to further degradation of the land, and a fall deeper into poverty.”

Ms. Wahlström said the timing of the report is “especially welcome” as it reinforces the recommendations which came out of last month's 4th Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction.

“Both processes recognize that the economic and social costs of disasters impact disproportionately on the poor,” she added. “Determined and consistent risk management is vital to the realization of the High-Level Panel's goal of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030.”

Meanwhile, the president of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Néstor Osorio, today highlighted the importance of renewed global partnerships in the creation of a post-2015 development agenda at an international forum in Ethiopia.

At the opening session of its high-level symposium in Addis Ababa, Mr. Osorio said the Development Cooperation Forum can help advance the substantive debate on global trends in development cooperation and serve as a forum for discussion.

“The main objective of the DCF in its current cycle is to advance a common understanding of what is needed to ensure development cooperation is fit for purpose for a post-2015 era,” Mr. Osorio told participants at the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) headquarters.

The DCF was mandated by the 2005 World Summit to engage all stakeholders in global dialogue on the effectiveness and coherence of development cooperation. This is the third high-level forum to be held since 2007.

The next will be held in July 2014 in New York, Mr. Osorio said.

## UN food operations boosted by Italian funding

**6 June** - The United Nations food agency today received a boost for its efforts to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, sustainable production and poverty eradication in rural areas, with a \$7.9 million announced donation from Italy.

The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) said in a news release that the traditional focus of cooperation with Italy has been food security, with projects ranging from support to farmer-based cooperatives and the commercialisation of agriculture to early warning to reduction of post-harvest losses.

The donation's announcement came at the end of a two-day Annual Review Meeting in Rome, during which FAO and Italian officials reviewed their cooperative programme, including the results achieved by more than 50 Italy-funded projects with a total budget of \$127.2 million.

Among the projects, a dairy project in Herat, western Afghanistan. The project, launched in 2007, to develop a commercial dairy production system to improve production, contributes to improving food security in the province.

Other funding from Italy goes to emergency relief projects.

"In emergency assistance, 40 per cent of Italian aid has gone to sub-Saharan Africa over the past five years," according to the news release. "The Near East has received 25 per cent and Asia about 20 per cent of emergency funding."

FAO will convene on 15 June the 38th session of its Conference in Rome.

## UN chief welcomes agreement between Seoul, Pyongyang to hold talks

**6 June** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the announcement by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea on their agreement to hold talks.

"This is an encouraging development towards reducing tensions and promoting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula," his spokesperson said in a statement.

Mr. Ban has reiterated that any differences related to the Korean peninsula should be resolved peacefully through dialogue.

His spokesperson said Mr. Ban is "hopeful" that this is the beginning of a trust-building process between the parties.

"He encourages them to build on this opportunity and to generate momentum for further progress," his spokesperson said in a statement, adding that as Secretary-General, Mr. Ban will spare no effort to support inter-Korean reconciliation.

During the noon briefing at the UN Headquarters in New York, the spokesperson added that the agreement to hold talks is related to the Kaesong Industrial Complex, in the border town of Kaesong just across the Demilitarized Zone.

The complex reportedly employs more than 53,000 citizens of the DPRK at 123 companies of the Republic of Korea (ROK).

Mr. Ban had called it a "valuable bridge between the two countries" and said he was "seriously concerned" when the complex was shut in April.



Dairy workers with a milk canister in Afghanistan. Photo: UNAMA/Jawad Jalali



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

## Leadership, commitment keys to winning battle against undernutrition, UN agency says



Child's arm being measured to assess his nutritional state at a feeding centre in Dahakula village, Bangladesh. Photo: WFP/S. Noorani

**6 June** - With 165 million children around the world who are stunted as a result of undernutrition, the United Nations children's agency has reiterated its calls to invest in the first 1,000 days of a child's life.

"The battle against undernutrition is being won, but progress is too slow for too many," said Werner Schultink, the head of nutrition at the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

"Our message is clear – that the time is now for all of us to demonstrate resolute leadership and steadfast commitment for the millions of mothers and children who still fall victim to undernutrition," Mr. Schultink said yesterday in a news release from UNICEF.

The call comes as Governments of Brazil and the United Kingdom, and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), are today hosting a summit in London to tackle undernutrition and agree on cutting the number of stunted children by an additional 20 million in the 20 highest burden countries by 2020.

Meanwhile, the medical journal "Lancet" has reported that malnutrition is responsible for the deaths of 3.1 million children each year or 45 per cent of all deaths of children under five years of age. The figure is higher than the journal's last estimates in 2008.

The study found that children born too small for their gestational age – more than a quarter of births in low- and middle-income countries – were at a substantially greater risk of dying.

The findings are in line with a UNICEF report, *Improving Child Nutrition: The achievable imperative for global progress*, which highlights the importance of nutrition during pregnancy and the first two years of a child's life or the first 1,000 days.

Ending stunting and other forms of undernutrition saves lives and improves health, prospects for children and development progress. "This is why the fight against undernutrition has to be a global imperative for donors, for affected countries, for innovators in the private sector and for communities themselves," said Mr. Schultink.

"That's the sort of shared commitment we see in the Scaling up Nutrition Network, where 40 countries are already taking tangible steps to increase and better target investments and sharpen policies and nutrition-focused programmes."

An estimated 80 per cent of the world's stunted children live in just 14 countries, according to UNICEF. The report highlights successes in scaling up nutrition and improving policies through proven interventions, such as promoting exclusive breastfeeding, addressing micronutrient deficiencies and improving maternal nutrition before and during pregnancy. The case studies are in 11 countries: Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Nepal, Peru, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sri Lanka, Kyrgyzstan, the United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam.

In addition, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the Every Woman Every Child initiative in 2010 to save the lives of 16 million women and children by 2015 by mobilizing governments, multilaterals, the private sector and civil society to address the major health challenges facing women and children around the world, including poor nutrition.

To date, Every Woman Every Child has brought together 260 partners and made ambitious commitments to advance its goal, and billions of dollars in new funding for women's and children's health have been mobilized and \$10 billion has already been delivered.

The health of women and children is critically important to almost every area of human development and progress, and directly impacts our success in achieving the eight anti-poverty goals known as the Millennium Development Goals, which have a deadline of December 2015.