



In the headlines:

- Ban seeks 100-member joint mission to oversee destruction of Syrian chemical weapons
- Water holds key to sustainable development, UN chief tells Budapest summit
- Urgent action needed to eradicate child labour by 2016, says senior UN official
- UN emergency funding approves \$3 million for crisis in southern Philippines
- UN chief urges journalists to increase dialogue in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts
- DR Congo: UN agency in need of funding to assist growing number of displaced persons
- In UN report, ICC urges Security Council support to enforce decisions
- Violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state must end for sake of children – UNICEF
- Maldives: Ban urges peaceful election after highest court calls for fresh presidential vote

Ban seeks 100-member joint mission to oversee destruction of Syrian chemical weapons

8 October - Nearly 100 United Nations and chemical weapons experts will be deployed over the coming months in a joint mission overseeing the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles, with many members of the team to be based in Cyprus due to the dangers on the ground in the war-torn country, under a proposal submitted by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

“The role of (UN) Member States will be critical,” he said in a letter to the UN Security Council outlining his plans for the Joint Mission with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to carry out last month's Council resolution on the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons material and equipment, scheduled for completion by 30 June, 2014.

“I call upon Member States to offer their full support to the work of the Joint Mission, including through the provision of financial, material, technical and operational assistance,” the Secretary-General added of the mission, which will be headed by a civilian Special Coordinator whom he will appoint in coordination with OPCW Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü.

“Given the operating environment, the Joint Mission will establish a ‘light footprint’ in Syria, only deploying to Syria those personnel whose presence is necessary in the country to perform their tasks,” Mr. Ban noted, adding that a staging area and support base will be established in

Cyprus and the UN contribution will primarily be for logistics, security, liaison, medical support, communications and administration.

The Council passed its resolution after Syria agreed to join the Chemical Weapons Convention following a chemical



UN and Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) inspectors checking their equipment in August 2013 in The Hague. Photo: OPCW

weapons attack in August that killed hundreds of people in a Damascus suburb, a “especially disturbing” event in a conflict that has already killed over 100,000 people and driven some 6.5 million others from their homes since protesters first sought the ouster of President Bashar al-Assad’s Government in March, 2011.

The Joint Mission will work in three phases, the first focusing on establishing an initial presence in Damascus and developing an initial operating capability, including verification activities through talks with the Government and planning for site visits.

In phase two, through 1 November, the OPCW must complete its initial inspections of all chemical weapons production and storage facilities, and oversee the destruction by Syria of all chemical weapons production and mixing and filling equipment.

Phase three “will most difficult and challenging phase...an operation the likes of which, quite simply, have never been tried before,” Mr. Ban stressed, noting that in the eight months from 1 November to 30 June, the Joint Mission will be expected to support, monitor and verify the destruction of a “complex chemical weapons programme involving multiple sites spread over a country engulfed in violent conflict, which includes approximately 1,000 metric tons of chemical weapons, agents and precursors that are dangerous to handle, dangerous to transport and dangerous to destroy.”

The destruction of chemical weapons facilities, stocks and associated material is the responsibility of the Syrian Government, since neither the OPCW nor the UN is mandated to conduct actual destruction activities.

The UN chief underscored that “without sustained, genuine commitment by the Syrian authorities, the joint mission will fail in its objectives.”

Given the complexities, “it is highly probable that assistance by other Member States will be required in the areas of the provision of both technical and operational advice, support and equipment, as well as security and possibly other areas in order to successfully complete the destruction and/or removal activities within the allotted time,” Mr. Ban stressed.

Because of potential public health and environmental risks from the destruction of chemical weapons and related materials, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) will provide guidance on public health issues.

Aware that the destruction of the chemical weapons alone will not end “the appalling suffering” of the Syrian people, Mr. Ban again reiterated that there is no military solution to the crisis and appealed for an inclusive and Syrian-led political process.

The Secretary-General notes in his letter that on 1 October, four days after the passage of the Council text, a joint advance team of 19 OPCW personnel and 16 UN personnel arrived in Damascus to initiate their activities. Since the deployment of the joint advance team, the Syrian Government has submitted supplementary information related to, among others, type and location of the chemical weapons in the country, and on storage, production, mixing and filling facilities.

On Sunday, the first verification visit took place. Mr. Ban says that under the supervision of OPCW experts, supported by the UN, Syria began to destroy its chemical weapons. Syrian personnel used cutting torches and angle grinders to destroy or disable a range of materials, including missile warheads, aerial bombs and mixing and filling equipment.

“I welcome this historic step, and urge all parties to do their part to ensure that this encouraging progress is maintained and indeed accelerated,” the Secretary-General said.

Water holds key to sustainable development, UN chief tells Budapest summit

8 October - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today stressed the vital role of water in sustainable development, highlighting in particular its importance with regard to food security, climate change and sanitation.

“Water holds the key to sustainable development. We need it for health, food security and economic progress,” Mr. Ban said in his opening remarks at the Budapest Water Summit. “Yet, each year brings new pressures.”

He noted that by 2030, nearly half the global population could be facing water scarcity and demand could outstrip supply by 40 per cent.

“We must address unsustainable use... We must use what we have more equitably and wisely. We cannot expect governments to do this alone. Guaranteeing a water secure world will require the full engagement of all actors, not least the world of business.”

Mr. Ban noted that agriculture is by far the largest user of freshwater, and there is growing urgency to reconcile its demands with the needs of domestic and industrial uses, especially energy production.

“Small farmers and industrial giants alike must learn to get more crop per drop,” he said. This means improved irrigation technologies, and less water-intensive and more climate-resilient crops.

Climate change, he continued, poses the risk of diminished water supplies in much of the world.

“We must make sure that water remains a catalyst for cooperation not conflict among communities and countries,” Mr. Ban said.

The UN stands ready to assist in this area, he added, noting for example the UN Development Programme’s (UNDP) Shared Waters Partnership that is supporting political agreement on common resources, such as in the Nile Basin.

He recalled that last month, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that climate change is affecting the global water cycle, noting that ‘extreme precipitation events’ will very likely become more intense and more frequent by the end of this century, as global surface temperatures increase.

“In layman’s terms, this means more floods,” said Mr. Ban. “We will also see more droughts.

That is why we must do everything we can to keep global temperature rise to below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. To do that, we need to finalize a robust legal agreement on climate change in 2015.”

He added that water and sanitation feature large in the anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), whose deadline is 2015. While the MDG target for providing access to improved water sources has been reached, 780 million people lack this basic necessity.

“Roughly 80 per cent of global wastewater from human settlements or industrial sources is discharged untreated. Water quality in at least parts of most major river systems still fails to meet basic World Health Organization standards. Close to one-third of people drink water that endangers health. Even more people lack adequate sanitation.”

“Some 2.5 billion people lack the dignity and health offered by access to a safe, decent toilet and protection from untreated waste,” he continued. “One billion people practice open defecation. Diarrhoea is the second biggest killer of children under



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (at lectern and on screens) addresses the 2013 Water Summit in Budapest, Hungary. UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras

five in the world after pneumonia...

“It is plain that investment in sanitation is a down-payment on a sustainable future,” said Mr. Ban. “Economists estimate that every dollar spent can bring a five-fold return.”

The Secretary-General said water and sanitation are obviously central to efforts to achieve the MDGs and must figure prominently in the post-2015 development agenda. “Beyond 2015, our aim is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and to create an equitable world of opportunity for all.

“Our societies cannot prosper without clean, plentiful freshwater. People cannot thrive without adequate sanitation.”

Speaking at a joint press encounter with Hungarian President János Áder, Mr. Ban said he was impressed by the turnout of many leaders from all around the world for the summit. “More and more countries recognize that water should be a source of common cause – not of conflict or not of concern,” he noted.

He also highlighted Hungary’s important international role in this effort, noting that it is a leader in the UN Group of Friends of Water, which is promoting wider understanding and cooperation on water issues.

“I also count on Hungary’s leadership on other long-term challenges. Poverty, environmental degradation and climate change will all define humanity’s fate in the future. That is why our campaign for sustainable development is so important.”

In addition to a working lunch with Mr. Áder, the Secretary-General also met separately with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán; Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, Chairman of the UN Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation; and Lamberto Zannier, Secretary-General of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Mr. Ban also delivered a lecture at Budapesti Corvinus University, where he received an honorary doctorate on behalf of the UN. He told students and faculty that they must do two things.

“First, spare no effort to reach the MDGs by the 2015 deadline. Second, define a new set of goals for the new set of challenges facing our world,” he said. “Now more than ever, sustainable development – integrating economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability – must be our global guiding principle.”

Urgent action needed to eradicate child labour by 2016, says senior UN official



ILO Director-General, Guy Ryder, addresses the opening ceremony of the Third Global Conference on Child Labour. Photo: ILO

8 October - A United Nations senior official today warned that if countries do not step up their efforts, they would fall short of reaching the agreed target of eradicating child labour 2016.

“Let us be clear. We will not meet the 2016 target and that is a collective policy failure. We have to do better,” the Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Guy Ryder, said at the opening ceremony of the Third Global Conference on Child Labour in Brasilia.

The ILO’s latest global estimates on child labour, released in the run-up to the conference, show that since 2010, the number of child labourers has fallen by one-third to 168 million.

Yet in spite of that drop, Mr. Ryder warned that globally, the number of child labourers is still very large - only 27 million fewer than the entire population of Brazil.

“These children constitute 168 million reasons for our presence here today,” he said, adding that progress is not happening fast enough.

Mr. Ryder stressed that child labour is not only a problem of poor or developing economies but that it affects all countries, and he urged participants to direct their efforts towards policies and actions that have been successful.

“We are seeing child labour concerns mainstreamed into public policy in multiple, relevant fields. We see greater clarity about the need for better school-to-work transition and skills-matching. We see a new global consensus on the need to ensure social protection floors for all people,” he said.

Child labour is predominant in agriculture, and in other sectors of the informal economy, and Mr. Ryder underlined the role of enterprises and trade unions in discussing how to clean up their value chains, protect and respect human rights at work and remedy violations.

Mr. Ryder also warned that there is a danger that as the “long march” against child labour appears to be entering its final phase, the international community could move its attention away from the struggle to end the scourge.

“That would be tragic and must not happen. The call from Brasilia must be for a renewed, collective effort.”

UN emergency funding approves \$3 million for crisis in southern Philippines



Overcrowding at the main evacuation centre in the coastal province of Zamboanga, Philippines, is causing increasing health risks and vulnerability for at least 70,000 people. Photo: OCHA

8 October - The United Nations emergency relief fund will allocate \$3 million to assist people in southern Philippines where recent armed conflict has displaced communities, a situation worsened by torrential rains over the past few days.

“Conditions are overcrowded as people originally displaced by conflict who had returned home, are now returning to displacement sites as well as newly displaced flood victims,” the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said.

Over 117,000 people are now displaced in Zamboanga City and over 8,000 are displaced in the Basilan province, the UN relief arm added.

The living conditions of the displaced communities further deteriorated with flooding in displacement sites as a result of rains the past four days with strong winds destroying plastic sheeting used as emergency shelter.

“We carried out an assessment with the Office of Civil Defence and looked at the most immediate needs of the displaced people,” said the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Luiza Carvalho.

“We are requesting \$24 million for the overall humanitarian operation and the CERF funding gives us the resources to scale up the response to support Government line departments and local authorities,” Ms. Carvalho added referring to the UN Central Emergency Response Fund.

She urged the international community to address the remaining \$21 million gap.

Managed by OCHA, the CERF is one of the world’s largest sources of humanitarian funding. The emergency funding was allocated to UN agencies and partners to enable them to provide life-saving assistance.

It will address the immediate needs of camp coordination and camp management; water, hygiene and sanitation; protection including child protection and gender-based violence; health including reproductive health; logistics; and food and non-food items such as cooking utensils.

“We have been working on the ground for a number of weeks now,” said Ms. Carvalho. “This visit has given me the opportunity to see the situation for myself and grasp the extent of the work ahead as well as the chance to witness the resilience of the affected communities, local authorities and NGO partners.”

This further heightens the communities' burden and exposes them to the elements, which requires immediate and additional response from the authorities and humanitarian actors.

Earlier this month, armed clashes erupted between Government forces and non-State actors in Zamboanga City. Some 132 people have died as a result of the standoff and OCHA estimated that some 158,000 people have been affected by the violence and more than 10,000 homes have been destroyed.

The humanitarian response is expected to last for up to six months.

UN chief urges journalists to increase dialogue in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts



Photo: Jean-Marc Ferré

8 October - Hailing a time of renewed hope for the Middle East peace efforts, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged participants in a United Nations-backed seminar to keep up their efforts to increase dialogue and understanding in the region.

“Many of you, as journalists, activists, policy-makers and representatives of civil society, have played a vital role in promoting transparency, accountability and democracy,” Mr. Ban told the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East Peace that began today in Istanbul, Turkey.

“I urge you to continue to advance peace and increase mutual understanding between communities, especially Palestinians and Israelis,” the UN chief added in a message delivered by Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal, head of the world body's Department of Public Information (DPI).

The two-day seminar, organized by DPI and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, is part of an annual project established by the General Assembly in 1991 to look at the role of the media in advancing the peace efforts.

This year, the seminar follows the first meeting in more than a year of the members of the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East peace process – the UN, the European Union, Russia and the United States – held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly high-level debate.

“The Quartet statement makes it clear that it is determined to lend effective support to the efforts of the parties and their shared commitment to reach a permanent status agreement within nine months,” said UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, in his keynote address to the seminar.

Mr. Serry, who participated in the Quartet meeting and several recent rounds of negotiations between the parties, said he harbours some hope but admits it is “very guarded.”

“It is now incumbent on the parties to sustain an enabling environment that offers a real chance for negotiations to move forward, take root, and achieve results,” Mr. Serry said. “As was also highlighted in the latest Quartet statement, both sides should take every possible step to promote conditions conducive to the success of the negotiating process and to refrain from actions that undermine trust or prejudice final status issues.”

He quoted Mr. Ban who had said that “Israelis and Palestinians must quickly see visible peace dividends,” and urged positive measures to bring tangible improvements to security and socioeconomic conditions for both sides.

The UN envoy further cautioned that violations of international law and violence risk undermining the confidence-building efforts necessary for peace negotiations.

On Gaza, Mr. Serry said the situation remains “precarious and non-sustainable”. In particular, he highlighted the “growing deficit of required electricity” which stems from obsolete power infrastructure and fuel shortages due to the closing of illegal tunnels.

“There is an urgent need for a safety net to ensure that continued provision of essential service,” he noted.

Turning to the participants, the senior UN official stressed that they have a “special role” to play in the peace efforts by bridging the divide to try and bring about a better understanding of the other’s narrative.

Throughout the seminar, participants will also hear from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the UN, Riyad Mansour.

The seminar’s panel discussions this year focus on: “Middle East’s peace process and media’s approach to the Palestinian issue”; “Forgotten discourses: Palestinian refugees and media's agenda today,” “Young activists in Middle East, digital media and social media,” and “Role and effects of visual media on Palestine issue in Israeli-Palestine dispute.”

Emphasizing the seminar’s focus on the media and its role in the search for Middle East peace and the question of Palestine, Mr. Launsky-Tieffenthal said the panel discussions are an opportunity for representatives of the media and of civil society from the region and beyond to come together to share their experiences and exchange their views.

DR Congo: UN agency in need of funding to assist growing number of displaced persons



The Kambilo camp in Katanga, south-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is home to some of the people who have been forced from their home by violence and instability in the east of the country. Photo: OCHA/Gemma Cortes

8 October - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) today warned that it does not have the resources to provide assistance to a growing number of people displaced by fighting in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Initial assessments showed that around 80,000 people uprooted by clashes between the national army and rebels are in need of assistance in the Irumu region of Ituri in Province Orientale, WFP spokesperson Elisabeth Byrs told reporters in Geneva.

However, that number could increase to 120,000 to 150,000 people as fighting was still ongoing and assessments in some areas had been impossible due to security reasons, she added.

Given the displacement trends, WFP needs \$4.2 million to cover needs for at least three months for 80,000 people. Ms. Byrs said the agency is currently diverting food stocks from other planned activities to help meet needs.

She noted that some areas are currently relatively stable and accessible, with identified concentrations of displaced households. Access is limited though in areas where fighting is ongoing, and displaced households are moving from location to location on a daily basis.

WFP started its assistance on 13 September, and has thus far assisted around 62,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host families. Beneficiary registrations are ongoing in Komanda and Soke. WFP intends to assist an additional 45,000 people between 10 and 13 October.

Fighting over the past year in eastern DRC has displaced more than 100,000 people, exacerbating an ongoing humanitarian crisis in the region which already includes 2.6 million IDPs and 6.4 million in need of food and emergency aid.

In UN report, ICC urges Security Council support to enforce decisions



The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. Photo: ICC-CPI/Max Koot

8 October - The International Criminal Court (ICC) has had the busiest year on record, the body said in a report to the United Nations General Assembly, in which it also called for greater support from the UN Security Council.

“UN Security Council referrals to the ICC – such as Libya and Darfur – risk becoming ‘futile’ without the necessary support to enforce the Court’s decisions,” the ICC said releasing its 2012-2013 report to the General Assembly.

A total of 13 arrest warrants issued by the ICC remain outstanding – some since 2005 – for persons suspected of having committed genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes.

The Court also called for strong and consistent international support to carry out its mandate, stressing it is crucial that States “provide timely and full cooperation to the Court in accordance with their legal obligations, and that appropriate action is taken in case of non-cooperation”.

In its report, the ICC also recognized the importance of cooperation with regional organizations, particularly the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU), as well as the Court’s continuing relationships with the League of Arab States and the Organization of American States (OAS).

The Hague-based ICC is an independent, permanent court that investigates and prosecutes persons accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and is based on a treaty known as the Rome Statute. To date, 122 States have accepted its jurisdiction in investigations of crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide.

The Rome Statute also reserves a role for the Security Council, which can refer situations to the ICC.

In today’s report, the court said it is facing an increasing workload “investigating more allegations involving more suspects than ever before.” It noted that there are already eight situations under investigation and a further eight under preliminary examination, as well as ongoing cases at trial, appeal and pre-trial stages.

The ICC Prosecutor, Gambian lawyer Fatou Bensouda, opened the latest formal investigation in January, concerning allegations of crimes occurring in Mali since January 2012.

The case includes allegations of intentional attacks against buildings dedicated to religion and historic monuments, including those that have received World Heritage status.

Violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state must end for sake of children – UNICEF

8 October - Citing the negative impact of the inter-communal clashes in Myanmar’s Rakhine state on children in the region, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today urged all parties to put an end to the violence.

“In the name of Myanmar’s children, now is the time for this violence to end,” said Bertrand Bainvel, UNICEF Representative in Yangon. “Hate messages and inflammatory propaganda just perpetuate the cycle of violence, and it is children who suffer.”



Credit: UNICEF Myanmar

Rakhine state has been the site of inter-communal violence since June 2012, with clashes between ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims, which eventually led the Government to declare a state of

emergency there. Some 75,000 people were uprooted in the first wave of riots and another 36,000 were displaced by a second wave of unrest in October last year.

The latest wave of violence broke out on 29 September in the southern town of Thandwe. Initial reports soon after suggested that the fighting had been brought under control, but later reports stated that hostilities recommenced on 1 October and subsequently spread to Tha Byu Chaing, Pauk Taw, Shwe Hlay and Me Kyun townships. Deaths have been reported, along with the destruction of some 110 homes.

The violence has also caused a new wave of displacement of families and added to the fears of those displaced last year.

“When violence drives people from their homes, children who are displaced and those in the host communities suffer,” said Mr. Bainvel. “Displacement puts children at greater risk of family separation and domestic violence, they miss out on schooling and too frequently they experience physical and emotional damage.”

UNICEF is also concerned that the polarization resulting from ongoing inter-communal violence could stall or put at risk the many important reform processes currently underway in Myanmar, with negative repercussions for all of Myanmar’s children.

“Peace-building and reconciliation activities must be prioritized if Myanmar’s children are to have the future they deserve, and to which they have a right,” Mr. Bainvel said.

Welcoming recent calls for peace, stability and the rule of law and for the arrest of alleged perpetrators of violence, UNICEF called for all perpetrators of violations of the rights of children – particularly those who commit violent acts against children – to be held to account and brought to justice.

Maldives: Ban urges peaceful election after highest court calls for fresh presidential vote

8 October - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today reiterated his calls on all Maldivians to ensure a peaceful, inclusive and credible process for the presidential elections which will be held anew later this month.

The country’s Supreme Court annulled the results of the first round of polls, which had been held on 7 September, and called for a new vote.

“The Secretary-General takes note of the Maldivian Supreme Court’s decision,” his spokesperson said in a statement.

The spokesperson added that Mr. Ban “acknowledges the continuing efforts by the Elections Commission of the Maldives.”

Earlier today, the Commission announced that a revote will be held 19 October.

The election had been seen as an important step in the country’s democratic transition. The Maldives underwent a change of Government in 2012, when the previous democratically-elected President, Mohamed Nasheed, resigned in contested circumstances. He was succeeded by his former deputy, Mohammed Waheed Hassan.

The first round of the presidential election was widely recognized as a success by international and domestic election observers. A second round had been scheduled for 28 September.



UN Photo/Steve Tickner