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## **Thousands of Syrian children fleeing country alone, UN agency warns**

**20 September** - More than 4,000 Syrian children have crossed borders into neighbouring countries without parents or adult relatives, the United Nations children's agency said today, warning that without the protection of guardians, they remain extraordinarily vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) spokesperson Marixie Mercado told journalists in Geneva that many of the children "were working to provide income back to families, and were desperate to get back to school."

Of the 4,150 Syrian children identified and registered, at least 1,698 are in Lebanon where in the

Beka'a Valley area, many are swept up and used for agricultural child labour.

In Iraq, the UN agency estimated that there were 300 newly-arrived unaccompanied and separated children in the north.

Jordan is home to about 1,170 children, including some as young as nine-years-old. Most of these children, Ms. Mercado said, are in Za'atari camp, which despite being a makeshift camp housing more than 120,000 people is Jordan's fourth largest city.

"Each of those children had witnessed, or been a victim of horrific levels of violence," Ms. Mercado said, adding that some



Over half of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are children. Photo: OCHA/D. Palanivelu

children ran for their lives from the fighting, while others went to find relatives who had earlier left. Still others were being sent away to avoid conscription.

UNICEF was working with partners to identify the children and make sure they are being protected, as well as to provide medical, psychosocial and educational support.

She told a story of 11-year-old Aya who lived with her uncle in a settlement in an almond orchard, taking care of her younger siblings.

“She started going to UNICEF-supported recreational activities, and last Thursday, for the first time, she spoke about seeing her father hacked to pieces in front of her,” Ms. Mercado said.

In New York today, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos voiced the hope that Syria’s agreement to hand over its chemical weapons would prompt countries to pledge more money for the world body’s relief efforts.

“These humanitarian issues and the human rights abuses that are really spiralling out of control inside Syria – we need our political leaders to address those as well,” she added.

Also today, the UN food relief agency called for safe passage to people trapped in conflict areas in Damascus, Rural Damascus and several other areas in Syria, particularly families relying on WFP’s food rations to survive month to month.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) “was not giving up and would deploy all its logistical possibilities and its experience in this field to reach those people,” spokesperson Elisabeth Byrs said.

She added those logistics were increasingly difficult. Since the beginning of the year, the WFP had recorded close to 50 incidents of theft and confiscation against food trucks by armed groups. This week, a WFP warehouse in Rural Damascus was caught in the crossfire when three mortar bombs hit the building, causing structural damage.

Since mid-2012, the UN agency had been unable to access 38 locations such as Moadamiyeh, Daraya, Armouk, Hajar Aswad, Yalda, Babila, Sbineh, Douma, Jobar, Qaboon, Zamalka and Erbeen which were some of the most deprived areas where even the most basic items were in scarce supply, Ms. Mercado said.

Elsewhere, in Northeast Syria, the WFP last month was unable to deliver food rations to its three partners in Al Hassakeh as the roads from both Ar Raqqa and Deir Ezzor were blocked by armed groups.

## Central African Republic: UN agencies scaling-up aid amidst more displacement

**20 September** - The United Nations food relief agency is reopening its offices in the northern parts of the country and using mobile teams to reach some of the 500,000 people estimated to be in dire need of aid in the Central African Republic (CAR), as fresh fighting in the northwest is displacing more families.

Wrapping up a two-day visit to the country, UN World Food Programme (WFP) Regional Director for West Africa, Denise Brown, said the UN agency is committed to scaling up operations, “The presence of the international humanitarian community in CAR in full force is extremely important.”

The CAR – which has been marked by decades of instability and fighting – witnessed a resumption of violence last December when the Séléka rebel coalition launched a series of attacks. A peace agreement was reached in January, but the rebels again seized the capital, Bangui, in March, forcing President François Bozizé to flee.



Food rations being handed out at this WFP distribution centre on the grounds of the community hospital in Bangui, Central African Republic. Photo: WFP/Herve Sereffo

The recent fighting has further eroded even the most basic services in the country and exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation affecting the entire population of 4.6 million people, half of whom are children. Currently, 1.6 million people are in dire need of assistance, including food, protection, health care, water, sanitation and shelter.

Speaking at UN Headquarters in New York today, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos said she hoped a high-level meeting on CAR being held next week on the margins of the General Assembly's General Debate would provide the political and financial support for relief aid and rebuilding the country's institutions.

"We have seen over the last couple of weeks, increased violence, a lot of people being killed but we thought there was an opportunity given how fragile the country had become for the international community to really make a difference," she added.

Security incidents are still reported in the capital, Bangui, and across the country, and crime remains a major threat with the humanitarian community increasingly a target of looting and attacks by armed groups, according to WFP.

During the visit, Ms. Brown met with beneficiaries some 400 km northwest of the capital Bangui. She spoke to displaced people, many of them women, who had walked for days with their children in search of a safe place, leaving everything behind.

"We are at a critical time in the country when support is immediately required," Ms. Brown said, also highlighting the need to access areas of insecurity.

In meetings with President Michel Djotodia, Prime Minister Nicolas Tiangaye, and members of the transitional government, WFP said that Ms. Brown stressed security guarantees for WFP and its partners so they can safely carry out food assistance programmes.

Brown also met Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Babacar Gaye, and with Humanitarian Coordinator Kaarina Immonen and partners to underscore the importance of the international community's involvement, as well as education as priorities for CAR.

Starting next month, the UN agency said it plans to provide emergency school meals at schools that will reconvene. Many will remain closed and teachers are absent due to security reasons.

"The first day of school is around the corner. We have got to get the children back in school but we need security and conditions that allow parents to send their children to school in confidence" said Ms. Brown. "We need to do more, invest in education and nutrition and jump start the economy in this country".

In Bossangoa, some 300 km northwest of Bangui, an inter-agency mission with the UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN Children's Agency (UNICEF), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), WFP and partners arrives to assess the extent of the displacement.

"People they met spoke of multiple abuses by both sides in the conflict, including murder, rape, and torture," UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards told journalists in Geneva.

He said heavy clashes had been reported between Saturday and Tuesday between unidentified armed groups around Bossangoa and Bossemblele, 150 km northwest of Bangui.

"People told us that those who returned to their villages had to flee again, and spoke of arbitrary arrests, kidnappings, extortion and illegal taxation by armed men," the UNHCR spokesperson said.

The fighting appears to have subsided but situation remains tense, according to the UN agency.

It continues to provide aid kits consisting of tarpaulins, blankets, sleeping mats, kitchen sets, jerry cans, buckets, soap and



hygienic kits to women and girls in the area, as part of distribution to some 3,000 recently uprooted people.

## Italy must do more to combat human trafficking and sexual exploitation – UN expert

**20 September** - Warning that human trafficking in Italy, particularly for the sexual exploitation of women and girls, is growing, a United Nations human rights expert today called on the Government to boost its efforts to combat the scourge.

“Italy needs to rekindle its fight to end human trafficking, especially the unabated exploitation of the prostitution of foreign women and girls,” the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Joy Ngozi Ezeilo said in Rome at the end of a nine-day official visit.

“The anti-trafficking measures initiated by the Government require continuing monitoring and evaluation if significant progress is to be made and the vicious cycle broken.”

Ms. Ezeilo noted that sexual exploitation, especially involving women from Nigeria and Eastern Europe, is the most prevalent and documented form of trafficking in Italy, and the Arab uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria, have further exacerbated the problem of migrant inflow, smuggling and trafficking in persons for labour and sexual exploitation.

“The phenomenon of trafficking in persons in Italy is unfortunately growing in scale and traffickers are getting more daring in exploitation and abuse of their victims,” she said,

She recounted the stories of two victims she spoke to. One was a 21 year old Nigerian girl who travelled by plane from Nigeria transiting through Turkey, Serbia, Hungary and Slovenia. Not only was she trafficked but was held in debt bondage as her father back in Edo state had put up his land as collateral for the payment of the 60,000 euros illegal contract to bring her to Europe.

The young woman was moved from Turin to Milan and Paris to sell her body to repay her debt. She was rescued following a random identification check in Italy where she now benefits from assistance. The traffickers have continued to threaten her family in Nigeria since her disappearance from their radar.

In the second case Ms. Ezeilo recalled the traumatized face of an Asian woman victim of trafficking for labour exploitation who was forced to work in a sweatshop sewing all day. She was a victim of violence by her so-called boyfriend who exploited her. She lost her sight and suffered severe injuries on her hand for which she underwent surgery and is now recuperating in a shelter.

“Her determination to survive despite her traumatizing experience reminds us of a collective responsibility to bring succour to trafficked persons,” she said.

Special rapporteurs are independent experts who report to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, which appoints them.



A human trafficking awareness billboard.  
Photo: IRIN/Mohamed Amin Jibril

## After 20 years, UN commission on sustainable development holds final session



Exhibit on Sustainable Development hosted at Rio+20 Pavilion. UN Photo/M.E. Franco

**20 September** - Marking an important milestone, the United Nations commission on sustainable use of the world's resources today concluded two decades of work, paving the way for the incoming High-level Political Forum to boost efforts to tackle global economic, social and environmental challenges.

"The Commission's seminal work both gave us a working definition of sustainable development and inspired the very first international conference to address both the environment and economic development simultaneously, the Rio Earth Summit," said General Assembly President John W. Ashe in a statement delivered by his Deputy Chef-de-Cabinet, Noel Sinclair.

The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was formed after the 1992 Summit and helped to generate action on a range of issues that led to international agreements or treaties on energy, oceans, sustainable consumption and production, and others.

Its work also led to the establishment of the UN Forum on Forests, which has advanced progress on sustainable forestry through the adoption of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests in 2007.

Mr. Ashe, a former President of one of the CSD sessions and a national of Antigua and Barbuda, said the Commission also gave the world's small island developing States, and other countries in special circumstances, a "voice in this all-important conversation."

According to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's report on the lessons learned from the Commission, the contributions achieved by the CSD were also accompanied by a number of shortcomings, including the failure to fully integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

The Commission, the report found, was also weak on its review and impact on the implementation of sustainable development.

In June, the UN General Assembly established the High-level Political Forum, which will be launched on Tuesday at the high-level General Assembly debate in New York.

The meeting is due to chart the course for implementing outcomes of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, known as Rio+20, as well as accelerate progress on the eight anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and define a new development agenda post-2015.

The creation of the Forum emerged from Rio+20's outcome document "The Future We Want," to ensure that sustainable development tops the agenda of the highest levels of Government and is embraced by all actors.

"Rio+20 overhauled UN institutions for sustainable development," Bektas Mukhamedzhanov, Kazakhstan Vice-Minister of Environment Protection, said. "We must effectively use the new High-Level Political Forum to ensure that sustainable development continues to be implemented and is integrated into the heart of the post-2015 development agenda."

The Forum is due to convene annually at the ministerial level under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and it will, every four years, bring together heads of State to provide added momentum for sustainable development.

"One distinct benefit of the new forum is that it is designed to attract participation from representatives of all three dimensions of sustainable development, rather than chiefly from members of the environmental community," Mr. Ashe said

in today's statement.

In an event marking the closure, the head of the United Nations environment agency (UNEP), Achim Steiner, said while the closing feels melancholy, it should be an occasion to celebrate.

"It's an affirmation of evolution," Mr. Steiner said, not the equivalent of extinction, as CSD is replaced by its next articulation.

Also addressing the participants, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Wu Hongbo said the transition starts a new period in history.

"There is a realization that sustainable development—the integration of policies and actions that promote economic and social well-being that also protect the environment—have to have a prominent place on the international agenda at the highest levels," Mr. Hongbo said.

## UN to spotlight disability inclusive development at high-level meeting next week

**20 September** - Ahead of next week's high-level meeting to discuss the role of persons with disabilities in contributing to overall development, senior United Nations officials today urged the international community to advance the full and effective participation of the one billion persons with disabilities in society and in development beyond 2015.

"This is a group of the society too long considered a vulnerable group of society in need of help, while on the contrary, this is a resourceful group of society that can contribute in an enormous way to development," said Daniela Bas, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA).

Addressing journalists in New York, Ms. Bas emphasized that the upcoming meeting is meant to highlight "persons, persons, persons" with disability.

The General Assembly will convene on Monday at UN Headquarters in New York the first of its kind High-level Meeting on Realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other Internationally agreed Development Goals (MDGs) for Persons with Disabilities, focused on 'The way forward: a disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond.'

The meeting will result in an action-oriented outcome document supporting the aims of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the achievement of the eight anti-poverty targets known MDGs, and the sustainable development agenda beyond their completion in 2015.

The meeting is being organized with participation of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN World Health Organization (WHO) and other UN agencies, funds and programmes, as well as Member States and civil society.

Also addressing journalists, Dr. Jacob Kumaresan, Executive Director of the UN World Health Organization (WHO) Office in New York said that healthcare needs of people with disabilities and without are the same, ranging from immunizations to cancer screenings, but that people with disabilities often also have special needs, such as rehabilitation.

He noted that people with disabilities are three times more likely to be denied adequate healthcare, and that half of all disabled people are likely to suffer unexpected health expenditure that puts them and their families in poverty.

Monday's meeting will also address the importance of reaching children with disabilities during humanitarian responses and natural disasters, the Senior Adviser on Children with Disabilities at UNICEF, Rosangela Berman Bieler.



Daniela Bas, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA). UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras

She told the story of Fareeda who, during an emergency, was offered a wheelchair by several organizations, but none checked to see if she wanted to go to school, if she had food, or housing.

“This shows how development needs to improve to be able to address issues of children with disabilities, of people with disabilities,” Ms. Bieler said.

In May, UNICEF devoted its ‘State of the World’s Children 2013’ to children with disabilities.

The report’s underlying message is that girls and boys with disabilities “are not problems” but sisters, brothers, daughters, sons and friends with favourite foods and songs, dreams and rights. Eschewing a focus on traditional notions of “rescuing” the child, the report instead spotlights investment in removing the barriers that impede the realization of a child’s rights.

Among its key recommendations, UNICEF urges countries that have not yet done so to ratify and implement the CRPD and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRD).

There are currently 127 countries and the European Union that have ratified the CPBD – these States Parties are required to promote full equality and participation of persons with disabilities in society – and 76 which have signed the CRD.

## UN rights chief encourages Iranian Government to build on recent prisoner release



Rupert Colville, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). UN Photo

**20 September** - The United Nations human rights chief has welcomed this week’s release of 12 political prisoners in Iran, including a number of women’s rights activists, political activists and journalists, and encouraged Tehran to build on this positive step.

Among those released on Wednesday by the new Government of President Hassan Rouhani was Nasrin Sotoudeh, an internationally recognised human rights activist and recipient of the 2012 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Ms. Sotoudeh served half of a six-year sentence that was imposed on charges of ‘acting against national security,’ not wearing hejab (Islamic dress) during a videotaped message, propaganda against the system, and membership of the ‘Centre for Human Rights Defenders.’ She was also given a 10-year ban on exercising her profession as a lawyer.

“Activists like Nasrin Sotoudeh can make a major contribution to improving the protection of human rights in Iran, and we urge the Government to build on this positive step by creating space for human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists by allowing them to exercise their professions without harassment or sanctions by the state,” said Rupert Colville, spokesperson for High Commissioner Navi Pillay.

“We also call upon the Government to remove any restrictions placed on Ms. Sotoudeh’s travel and to rescind the ban on her practicing as a lawyer,” he told reporters in Geneva.

The High Commissioner also welcomed the recent news that the death sentence imposed on Iranian blogger Saeed Malekpour has been overturned.

She encouraged the Government to release all those held for exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of expression and association, said Mr. Colville.

## UNESCO chief denounces killing of Colombian radio host

**20 September** - The head of the United Nations agency tasked with defending press freedom today condemned the recent killing of radio host Édison Alberto Molina in the town of Puerto Berrio in Colombia.

Mr. Molina, a 40-year-old lawyer, hosted a radio programme on legal affairs on community station *Puerto Berrio Stereo*, where he regularly denounced corruption, according to a news release issued by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).



Stop killing journalists. Photo: UNESCO

He died on 11 September after being shot repeatedly while riding his motorbike home from the radio station with his wife, who was slightly injured in the attack. He is reported to have received several death threats in recent months.

“I condemn the killing of Édison Alberto Molina,” said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova. “It is essential that the perpetrators of this crime, which threatens the rights of Colombians to debate issues of concern, be brought to justice.”

Mr. Molina is the third journalist killed in Colombia since the beginning of the year, UNESCO stated.

## UN agency seeks additional \$21 million to assist Congolese refugees in Uganda



Congolese refugees with their belongings at the Bubukwanga transit centre in Uganda's Bundibugyo district. Photo: UNHCR/L. Beck

**20 September** - The United Nations refugee agency said today it is seeking an extra \$21.4 million to assist civilians who have fled the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and are taking refuge in neighbouring Uganda.

The amount covers needs until the end of the year and has been revised to reflect the influx into Uganda's Bundibugyo district of tens of thousands of refugees from the Kamango area of DRC's North Kivu province since July, said the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

It is part of the total \$43.7 million UNHCR is seeking to help Congolese refugees who have arrived in Uganda to escape violence in North Kivu province since early 2012. The larger appeal is only 28 per cent funded so far.

According to the agency, the recent influx from North Kivu to Bundibugyo began in July when a little-known Ugandan rebel group active in the DRC, the Allied Democratic Forces, attacked the town of Kamango and fought with Congolese Government troops, triggering waves of displacement.

“The situation is currently more or less stabilized, but about 100 people a day are still crossing the border into this mountainous, harsh but densely populated region,” UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards told reporters in Geneva.

Further south, near Goma, continuing clashes between armed groups and the Congolese army, backed by the UN intervention brigade, as well as fighting among the different militias and general lawlessness also continues to push people into Uganda.

The funds are vital for, among other priorities, providing health, water, sanitation and education services, as well as shelter materials, farming packs and household items.

There are currently an estimated 2.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in DRC, while more than 290,000 refugees have fled the country since the start of last year, UNHCR said. In Uganda, more than 170,000 have been assisted in three

districts.

## Ban offers condolences, UN assistance as hurricanes pummel Mexico

**20 September** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has voiced his sadness at the loss of life and damage in Mexico caused by Hurricanes Ingrid and Manuel, and offered the assistance of the United Nations.

Some 1.2 million people have been affected by the hurricanes since 17 September. Mexican authorities also report that 97 people have been killed.

“The Secretary-General extends his sincere condolences to the Mexican Government and people, particularly the families of those who have been killed,” his spokesperson said in a statement. “He extends his solidarity to all those affected in this disaster.”



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe (file photo)

The UN stands ready to lend its assistance to efforts to respond to humanitarian needs resulting from the disaster and to mobilize any international support needed, he added.

A state of emergency has been declared in hundreds of municipalities along the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Coast, as further severe storms are expected.

## Ban calls on world’s business leaders to play key role in sustainable development



Credit: UN Global Compact

**20 September** - Warning that “we cannot accept a rising tide that floats only some boats and leaves many to drown,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on business leaders to do even more in conjunction with the United Nations to promote sustainable development worldwide.

“That is where you come in,” he told over a thousand corporate executives attending the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit in New York, stressing the need for all actors to work together to pursue a sustainable path that links economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship. “My appeal to you is to act for the common good – and to get others to join you. This is the morally correct thing to do. And it is the smart choice, too.”

The UN Global Compact, set up in 2000, is the world’s largest corporate sustainability initiative, with the participation of 8,000 companies and 4,000 civil society organizations from 145 countries seeking to link business engagement with global priorities, including poverty and disease eradication, climate change mitigation, women’s empowerment, children’s and labour rights, and fighting corruption.

“The sustainable journey that we all need to take is in everybody’s best interest – even if it may sometimes demand short-term sacrifice,” Mr. Ban told the summit, which is expected to endorse a new global architecture for the corporate role in sustainable development in the years following the end in 2015 of the current cycle based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the eight anti-poverty targets agreed by world leaders at a UN summit in 2000.

These set specific goals for slashing extreme poverty and hunger, ensuring access to universal health care and education, achieving gender equality, cutting maternal and child mortality, securing environmental stability, reducing HIV/AIDS and forging a global partnership for development, all by the end of 2015.

“Nobody can benefit from catastrophic climate change or rampant unemployment and the social unrest that comes with it,” Mr. Ban said. “Prosperous, stable societies and a healthy planet are the bedrock of political stability, economic growth and flourishing new markets.”

He stressed that companies that take their responsibilities to people and the planet seriously will increasingly be in the vanguard, noting that more than ever, corporate executives see a direct link between sustainability and the bottom line, and called on business leaders to play a leading role in countering climate change through sustainable energy and job-rich low-carbon growth.

“Great advances towards eradicating poverty and disease point to what can be achieved when we work together,” he declared. “But I want you to go further. First, I want you to see what more you can or should be doing in your own operations and in your relationships with trading partners. Second, I want you to act on your commitment by helping to swell the ranks of the Global Compact so we reach a critical mass.”

Mr. Ban laid before the summit the Compact’s report on ‘Building a Business Engagement Architecture for the Post-2015 Agenda,’ which seeks to scale up corporate actions to directly advance UN goals and calls on corporate leaders to work together on an entirely new scale by collaborating and co-investing to share risks and realize opportunities.

“Your support is essential,” Mr. Ban declared. “Today, I ask you to be architects of better world. What was once a call to the founding members of the United Nations is now a rallying cry to business and civil society leaders everywhere.”

## **‘Predictable and sustained’ international support vital for Afghan transition – UN official**



Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson.  
UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

**20 September** - “Predictable and sustained” international support for Afghanistan will be critical as the country proceeds with its transition, prepares to hold elections next year and international forces draw down by the end of 2014, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said today.

“In a period of uncertainty, the Afghans must know that they will not be abandoned or forgotten by the international community. Predictable and sustained support will send that important signal,” Mr. Eliasson told a meeting at UN Headquarters of the International Contact Group on Afghanistan.

The Group, which comprises more than 50 States and organizations, meets three times a year. Today’s meeting, convened by the Group’s Chairman, Ambassador Michael Koch of Germany, focused on preparations for next year’s presidential elections as well as the role of the UN beyond 2014, when the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is expected to leave.

“Credible elections,” said Mr. Eliasson, “will give Afghans confidence in the future of their country, and help lay the foundations for further progress for security, reconciliation and development.”

Elections will also be a major test of the capability of Afghan forces to plan and provide inclusive countrywide security during this crucial period, and can contribute to creating the conditions for progress.

As for the UN’s future role, Mr. Eliasson said the world body is committed to a long-term partnership “in line with the wishes of the Government and the people of Afghanistan.”

“How our partnership evolves to best meet Afghanistan’s priorities and needs is the subject of our ongoing dialogue,” he stated.

Mr. Koch said the intention of today’s meeting was to highlight the “absolutely crucial” role that the UN and its many components have played since 2001, since the effort to create a new Afghanistan was launched.

It was to highlight this role, commend the UN for the wonderful work that it has undertaken on behalf of the people of Afghanistan, and, perhaps most importantly, to launch a debate on what this role should be like once ISAF is drawn down, he told a news conference after the meeting.

The Group also heard an extensive briefing by the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) on “the state of play there,” he added, and discussed ways in which the international community can help to make them “the best elections possible.”

Ershad Ahmadi, Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, told reporters that the country is in a “very critical and decisive stage” as it continues to move forward in the transition. “The decisions that we are facing now will have wide-ranging implications for long-term peace and security,” he stated.

“In this context, it is rather important to make sure that the international community stays engaged and focused on the priorities that we are dealing with and continue to support Afghanistan as we move towards the future.”

## UN official dismayed at Israeli obstruction of humanitarian aid for Palestinians



Israeli soldiers search a Palestinian's car at the Hawera checkpoint outside the town of Nablus in the West Bank. Photo: IRIN/Kobi Wolf

**20 September** - A senior United Nations relief official today expressed deep concern that Israeli forces prevented the provision of humanitarian assistance to a Palestinian community in urgent need in the occupied West Bank.

Israeli forces seized a vehicle carrying tents from an international humanitarian organization destined for the community of Makhul, where 48 Palestinians, including 16 children, are in urgent need of emergency shelter following repeated demolitions this week by the Israeli authorities.

The forces also confronted members of the humanitarian and diplomatic communities who were present on site, according to information provided by the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO).

“The United Nations and its partners remain committed to providing humanitarian assistance to populations in immediate need,” said Deputy Special Coordinator James W. Rawley, who is also UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory.

He added that the international humanitarian community would continue efforts to mitigate the humanitarian impact, including displacement and loss of livelihoods, of demolitions which have been on the rise over recent months in the West Bank.

“I call upon the Israeli authorities to live up to their obligations as occupying Power to protect those communities under their responsibility, including to halt demolitions of Palestinian homes and property,” said Mr. Rawley.

“The displacement of a whole Palestinian community in the occupied Palestinian territory is a very disappointing development at such a delicate moment where we look forward to positive measures on the ground,” he added.