Opening forum, General Assembly President calls for renewed commitment to multilateralism

24 September - As he opened the annual United Nations forum for world leaders today, the President of the General Assembly appealed to them to renew their commitment to work together to eradicate poverty and foster economic and social prosperity for people across the world through a new development agenda.

“Effective multilateralism takes dogged determination and a commitment to negotiate and work cooperatively, especially if the quest is to evolve towards a shared consensus that is both broad and lasting.” John W. Ashe told heads of State and Government and other high representatives gathered for the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York.

The theme for this year’s session is ‘The Post-2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage,’ and Mr. Ashe urged Member States to take this opportunity to help shape an inclusive development agenda.

“The Post-2015 Development Agenda is envisaged as the most far-reaching and comprehensive development-related endeavour ever undertaken by our Organization in its entire history,” he said. “It will completely redefine the concept of development as traditionally understood, rooting it in partnership, cooperation, equity – both social and generational – peace, good governance and economic growth based on environmental sustainability.”

Mr. Ashe noted that while this year’s meeting is happening amid conflict in various regions, with many countries struggling
with the adverse effects of climate change and millions of people still living in extreme poverty, Member States should not give in to pessimism but should work even harder to address such issues.

“This annual gathering of world leaders and dignitaries should not just be seen as another September routine or tradition; rather, it serves and should serve another larger and better purpose – that of recommitting ourselves and our countries to the noble ideals that lie at the organization’s core,” Mr. Ashe said.

“We are faced with high levels of pessimism and cynicism that we will not be up to the task and that we lack the effort and discipline to effectively address the world’s needs. Let us prove the nay-sayers wrong – let us put our shoulders to the plough and work with each other in a spirit of collaboration.

“Let us focus on the business ahead, cognisant of the sacred trust which brings us here, committed to the peoples we serve, looking beyond individual and narrow interests and intending to conclude the work we must do here. Let us not forget that while we sit in this august gathering, there are millions who go to sleep in the dark, hungry and insecure, fearful of what another tomorrow may bring.”

Beginning Tuesday and continuing through 1 October, the General Debate will provide an opportunity for high-level political officials to weigh in on what Mr. Ashe has called “pivotal” talks on identifying the parameters of the post-2015 sustainability agenda, which will succeed the eight anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Thus far, 84 heads of State, 41 heads of Government, 11 Deputy Prime Ministers and 65 Foreign Ministers are scheduled to address the Assembly on sustainable development, poverty eradication, climate change, human rights, and a range of peace and security issues.

UN chief urges world leaders to answer demands of their people for dignity, development

24 September - Declaring that “leadership makes the difference,” United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged heads of State and Government gathered in New York to “hear the call of history” and, through hard work, commitment and integrity, answer the just demands of their people for human dignity and sustainable development.

“We come together not to preserve the status quo, but to drive our world forward,” said Mr. Ban, delivering his annual report on the work of the Organization and challenging Member States to take bold steps and work together to tackle a host of concerns – from crafting a post-2015 sustainability agenda, to agreeing on a new climate change regime and bringing parties in Syria to the negotiating table to end nearly three years of bloodshed.

“In the streets and squares across the world, people are pressing those in power. They want you, the world’s leaders, to listen. They want to know that we are doing all it takes to secure a life of dignity for all,” said the UN chief, ahead of the General Debate of the General Assembly’s 68th session.

While noting that the current era was one of wondrous opportunity, he said that the pressures on the planet and people are building. Young people are without jobs; the world’s climate is warming; and scattered conflicts remained unresolved. “Events are moving with 21st century speed, often outpacing the efforts of institutions and systems built for another age,” said Mr. Ban.

For more than a decade, the end of the year 2015 has been on the horizon. “What once seemed a distant moment is now just around the corner. It is the year by which the world has pledged to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),” and in which the international community will adopt a new development agenda. It is also the year in which stakeholders have agreed to complete a global legal agreement on climate change.

“2015 is a historic opportunity,” he said, noting that the MDGs captured the imagination, generated remarkable gains and
beat back doubts about development itself. “Yet on some goals, we lag badly,” he said, noting that inequality is growing, and too many people face exploitation – from the fields to the factory floor.

“A new development agenda must be as inspiring as the MDGs, but it must go further,” the UN chief declared, urging a universal framework with ending poverty as a top priority, sustainable development at its core and governance as its glue. It must find expression in a single set of goals and the three dimensions of sustainable development must be treated equally: there must be no deferring the environment or social injustice until later, once economic growth is ensured.

Moreover, the rights of women and girls must be at the heart of all such efforts, he continued, calling for the 21st century to be the century of women.

Turning to climate change, the Secretary-General said the impacts of the phenomenon “threaten all our development gains.” Indeed, the rising human and economic toll affects everyone, with the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people harmed “first and worst.”

Nevertheless, while the planet and its scientists were sending a clear message, “there is opportunity amid this peril,” and he invited all delegations to attend a climate summit in New York at this time next year to identify ways to “change the way we do business, plan our cities, fuel our homes and factories, and move our goods and ourselves.”

He challenged Member States to bring bold pledges to the summit that will help close the “emissions gap” and put the world on track for an ambitious legal agreement through the UN Climate Change Convention framework. “Let us seize the 2015 challenge: a final push for the MDGs, new direction on energy and climate and an inspiring new development framework,” he declared.

Turning next to what he called the “biggest peace and security crisis in the world,” Mr. Ban said the crisis in Syria, where well over 100,000 people have been killed and over 7 million have fled their homes, has destabilized the Middle East. “We have seen the worst chemical weapons attack on civilians in a quarter century,” he said, also underscoring that a “lost generation” of young people now filled refugee camps.

“We face a moment of reckoning. The Syrian Government must fully and quickly honour the obligations it has assumed in acceding to the Chemical Weapons Convention,” he declared, adding that the international community must bring to justice the perpetrators of chemical weapons use, and, with equal determination, ensure the safeguarding and destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles and programmes.

At the same time, he stressed that the majority of the killings and atrocities in the country had been wrought by conventional weapons and he appealed to all States to stop fuelling the bloodshed and to end the arms flows to all parties.

“I look forward to the imminent adoption of an enforceable Security Council resolution on chemical weapons,” the UN chief said, which should be followed up immediately by humanitarian action. In that context, UN human rights monitors could play a more useful role in reporting and deterring further violations.

“I call on the Syrian Government and the opposition to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law,” he said, urging them to lift all obstacles to humanitarian access and end the “unconscionable” targeting of medical facilities and personnel.

Full accountability for serious international crimes is also vital, Mr. Ban continued, noting such steps as referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or through other means consistent with international law.

“The response to the heinous use of chemical weapons has created diplomatic momentum – the first signs of unity in far too long. Now we must build on it to get the parties to the negotiating table,” he said, as the only answer is a political settlement.

In that context, he appealed to the Syrian Government and the opposition – and all those in the Assembly hall with influence over the parties – to make the so-called “Geneva II” conference a reality. “It is time to end the killing and to reach the peace the Syrian people need and deserve,” he said.
The Secretary-General went on to note that the historic transitions in the Middle East and North Africa have stumbled or slowed, and that springs of opportunity are giving way to winters of disillusionment. Yet, amid immense challenges, the story of the region was still being written, and he urged the international community to seize potential openings and respond to declarations of good will.

He welcomed the re-engagement of Israelis and Palestinians in direct negotiations, “and the bold diplomacy that made this possible.” He urged the parties to show leadership on the ground and noted that the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East peace process will meet on the margins of the General Debate later in the week to lend its support.

Turning to Africa, where he saw the continent’s people writing new chapters of dynamism, democracy and sustained, impressive economic growth, Mr. Ban noted that while political progress in Somalia and the new framework for hope in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) “are gains to build on,” misery and volatility still haunted the Sahel region.

Further, there had been a breakdown in law and order in the Central African Republic (CAR) and while millions of people were suffering there, the UN humanitarian appeal was “woefully underfunded.”

And in just the past week, in appalling attacks in Kenya, Pakistan and Iraq, the international community had been reminded of the ability of terrorists to wreak havoc.

“Throughout the world we see again the centrality of human rights and the rule of law as foundations of stability and coexistence,” he said, and in that context urged Member States to reinforce their commitment to the ICC and made a special appeal on behalf of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, which faced a “deep and chronic” funding shortage that had now put its very survival in question.

As for human rights, he said the inability of Member States and the UN to prevent and end large-scale rights violations “has had disastrous consequences.” An internal review of UN action in Sri Lanka identified systemic failure: Member States did not provide the Organization with support to meet the tasks they themselves had set, and the UN system did not adapt properly or deliver fully.

Recalling that 2013 is the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration on human rights, the Secretary-General pledged to do more to help Member States reach early consensus to prevent large-scale rights violations. He added that he was implementing recommendations to ensure that the UN system upholds its responsibilities under the Charter.

“There will be little peace or enjoyment of human rights unless we confront a world awash in deadly weapons,” he said, hailing the adoption earlier this year of the Arms Trade Treaty. At the same time, nuclear disarmament was languishing and deadly weapons were proliferating. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) was still not in force and small arms continued to kill and maim. And, at a time of pressing human need, “spending on weapons remains absurdly high,” he said, urging the gathered leaders to “get our priorities right and invest in people instead of wasting billions on deadly weapons.”

“You can be the [leaders] who preside over the end of poverty, give voice to the will of the people and usher in an era of sustainable development and lasting peace,” the Secretary-General said, urging delegations to “embrace the logic of our times” and seek even deeper cooperation on finding new ways of governing, partnering and problem-solving.

“Let us empower the United Nations to be more than a first responder or a last resort,” he said, adding that while change is inevitable, progress is not. “Leadership makes the difference,” he stressed.

“You in your home countries and we here together are at a privileged pinnacle. We must prove ourselves fit for purpose. We must listen to the demands of the world’s peoples and heed the call of history. We speak often of hope. Our duty is to turn hope into action, through hard work, commitment, skill and integrity. With passion, but most of all compassion, we can build the future your people want and that our world needs.”
US President urges UN Member States to confront 'profound new challenges’

24 September - With the world facing a raft of “profound new challenges,” United States President Barack Obama challenged United Nations Member States today to evince the courage and determination to act decisively “when the breakdown of societies is so great [and] the violence against civilians so substantial.”

“This body continues to be tested. The question is whether we possess the wisdom and the courage as […] members of an international community, to squarely meet those challenges: whether the United Nations can meet the test of our time,” Mr. Obama said, addressing the General Assembly’s annual General Debate.

Indeed, he said, the leaders that had built the UN understood that humanity could not survive the course it was on. For decades the Organization has made a difference: eradicating disease, educating children and brokering peace. But as new challenges continued to arise, three will be times when the international community is called upon to act, stated Mr. Obama.

“This will require new thinking and some very tough choices. While the United Nations was designed to prevent wars between States, increasingly we face the challenge of preventing slaughter within States,” he said, emphasizing that such challenges will grow more pronounced as the international community is confronted with States that are fragile or failing, “places where horrendous violence can put innocent men, women and children at risk with no hope of protection from their national institutions.

“I’ve made it clear that even when America’s core interests are not directly threatened, we stand ready to do our part to prevent mass atrocities and protect basic human rights. But we cannot and should not bear that burden alone,” Mr. Obama said.

Turning to Syria, where, he said, “peaceful protests against an authoritarian regime were met with repression and slaughter,” and in the face of such carnage, many retreated to their sectarian identities – Alawites and Sunni, Christian and Kurd – and the situation spiralled into civil war, the international community recognized the stakes early on, “but our response has not matched the scale of the challenge.”

Mr. Obama said that Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad’s traditional allies have “propped him up,” citing principles of sovereignty to shield his regime. And on 21 August, the regime used chemical weapons in an attack that “killed more than 1,000 people, including hundreds of children.”

He said that the crisis in Syria and the destabilization of the region goes to the heart of broader challenges that the international community must now confront. Putting key questions before Member States, he asked: “How should we respond to conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa? How do we address the choice of standing callously by while children are subjected to nerve gas, but we’re embroiling ourselves in someone else’s civil war? What is the role of the use of force?”

He said that the US believed that as a starting point, the international community must enforce the ban on chemical weapons. When he had stated his willingness to order a limited strike against the Assad Government in response to the brazen use of chemical weapons, “I did not do so lightly. I did so because I believe it is in the national security interests of the United States and in the interest of the world to meaningfully enforce a prohibition whose origins are older than the United Nations itself.”

The Syrian Government took a first step by giving an accounting of its stockpiles. Now, he said, there must be a strong Security Council resolution to verify that Damascus is keeping its commitments. “And there must be consequences if they fail to do so. If we cannot agree even on this, then it will show that the United Nations is incapable of enforcing the most
basic of international laws."

He did not believe that military action by those within Syria or by external powers can achieve a lasting peace, nor that the US or any nation should determine who will lead Syria. “That is for the Syrian people to decide,” he said, welcoming the influence of all nations that can help bring about a peaceful resolution. As negotiations continue on the holding of an international peace conference on Syria, he urged UN Member States to step up to meet humanitarian needs in Syria and surrounding countries.

On Iran, he acknowledged the deeply rooted mistrust between the two countries, dating back to 1979. And while he did not believe such difficult history could be overcome overnight, he did believe that if Washington and Tehran could resolve the issue of Iran’s nuclear programme, “that can serve as a major step down a long road toward a different relationship, one based on mutual interests and mutual respect.”

Insisting that Tehran meet its responsibilities under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Security Council resolutions, he also noted that Iran’s supreme leader has issued a fatwah against the development of nuclear weapons. And President Hassan Rouhani has just recently reiterated that Iran will never develop a nuclear weapon.

Mr. Obama said he was directing US Secretary of State John Kerry to pursue a diplomatic course with the Iranian Government in close cooperation with the European Union, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and China.

As for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, he said that the US will never compromise its commitment to Israel’s security, nor its support for its existence as a Jewish State. Likewise, the US remains committed to the belief that the Palestinian people have a right to live with security and dignity in their own sovereign State.

“The time is now ripe for the entire international community to get behind the pursuit of peace. Already, Israeli and Palestinian leaders have demonstrated a willingness to take significant political risks,” he said, urging Member States to be willing to take risks as well.

“Friends of Israel, including the United States, must recognize that Israel’s security as a Jewish and democratic State depends on the realization of a Palestinian State,” he said, adding that Arab States and those who support the Palestinians must recognize that stability will only be served through a two-State solution and a secure Israel.

Later in the day UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with President Obama and, according to a readout issued by a spokesman for the UN chief, the two discussed the situation in Syria, and agreed on the importance of continued UN engagement on the issue of Syrian chemical weapons, as well as the importance of a political solution and the need to avoid further loss of life.

Further to the readout, Mr. Ban and Mr. Obama discussed relations between the United States and Iran, and the importance of progress on the nuclear file. In addition, they discussed ongoing efforts in support of Somalia, Mali, Congo, Human Rights and UN reform.
At UN debate, Brazilian President urges protection of Internet users

24 September - In her speech to the General Assembly’s high-level debate today, the President of Brazil, Dilma Roussef, urged the United Nations to play a leading role in protecting Internet users from illegal interception of communications and data, and decried recent allegations of electronic information spying as “serious violations of human rights”.

Meddling in such a manner in the lives and affairs of other countries is a breach of international law and as such it is an affront to the principles that should otherwise govern relations among countries, especially among friendly nations,” Ms. Roussef said in reference to allegations that the information had been illegally gathered on the activities of the Brazilian Government.

Addressing a chamber of world leaders, as well as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and John Ashe, President of the 68th General Assembly, Ms. Roussef urged “the United Nations must properly regulate the behaviour of Member States regarding these technologies.”

She said Brazil would present proposals for the establishment of a framework for the governance and use of the Internet, and to ensure the effective protection of data that travels through the web.

It will be based on five key principles: freedom of speech; open, multi-lateral governance with transparency; principle of universality and non-discrimination; cultural diversity without imposing values; and network neutrality, guided only by technical and ethical criteria.

In her statement, Ms. Roussef noted Brazil’s fight “against poverty, hunger and inequality” which constitutes “the greatest challenge of our time.”

The UN is currently amidst its 800 days of accelerated action towards progress on the eight anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and laying the foundation for a sustainable development agenda in the years following the deadline in 2015.

“In the debate on the post-2015 Development Agenda we must focus on the result of the Rio+20,” Ms. Roussef said referring to the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development.

Rio+20’s outcome document “The Future We Want” led to the creation of the High-level Political Forum which aims to ensure that sustainable development tops the agenda of the highest levels of Government and is embraced by all actors. The Forum is due to meet for the first time today on the sidelines of the General Assembly.

Noting the June protests in parts of Brazil, Ms. Roussef said her Government listened to the demonstrators as an “inseparable part of the development of our democracy and of social change.”

Turning to Security Council reform, Ms. Roussef said the body’s “limited representation” is an issue of “grave concern” exemplified by its immense difficulty in offering a solution to the Syrian conflict and paralysis in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“We must provide the Council with voices that are at once independent and constructive,” the President said, urging expansion of the number of permanent and non-permanent members “to solve and overcome the Council’s definite of representation and legitimacy.”

On the issue of Syria, Ms. Roussef said it is “necessary to stop the killing” and cease the use of conventional and chemical arms, whether by the Government or the rebels.
She underscored that there is no military outcome to the crisis and that “the only solution is through negotiation, dialogue and understanding.”

Similarly, it is now time, Ms. Roussef said, to realize the wide international consensus in favour to the two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians.

Ms. Roussef and Mr. Ban discussed these topics during a bilateral meeting earlier today. According to a UN spokesperson, Mr. Ban also thanked Brazil for its “unwavering support” for Haiti and “outstanding” work of the Brazilian troops deployed to the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti known as MINUSTAH.

**Liberian President says country now on path of ‘irreversible progress’**

*24 September* - Achieving an average annual growth of over 7 per cent and improving governance and accountability has put Liberia on the path to “irreversible progress”, noted President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as she addressed the 68th session of the General Assembly.

Liberia has returned to the comity of nations as a “respectable and responsible partner” over the last 10 years, and while the country has come a long way “we have a long way to go,” added President Johnson-Sirleaf in her address to the Assembly’s General Debate which began at UN Headquarters today and runs through 1 October.

Thanking the Organization for extending the UN peacekeeping operation in Liberia through September 2014, the President reiterated her country’s commitment to building a competent security sector, able to tackle violent crimes, sexual and gender-based violence.

The UN has maintained a peacekeeping force in Liberia since 2003 to bolster a ceasefire agreement ending a decade of war that killed nearly 150,000 people, mostly civilians. The mandate of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) includes helping to restore the rule of law and democratic processes, as well as facilitating humanitarian assistance.

In extending UNMIL’s mandate for another year, the Security Council endorsed the continued drawdown of the mission’s military component agreed upon last year by a further 1,129 personnel by next September, with the goal of leaving its military strength at some 3,750 personnel by July 2015.

Referring to the conflict in Syria, Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf said her country agonizes with the people, “particularly those innocent women and children who suffer most.” She went on to condemn the use of chemical weapons in Syria and anywhere in the world.

In her capacity as one of three co-Chairs of a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons tasked to make recommendations for a new global development agenda post-2015, she reminded delegations that the solutions of yesterday may not apply to today’s challenges. “We must muscle the courage to take bold steps,” she said.

In Africa, a continental consensus was being sought to forge a global development framework that reflects African priorities; and one that creates an “enabling environment for Africa’s transformation,” which includes infrastructure development and steps to accelerate creation of employment aimed at young populations, the President remarked.

Of an estimated 7 billion people in the world, 1.5 billion live in situations of conflict and fragility, President Johnson-Sirleaf remarked, urging that the peculiarities and special circumstances of post-conflict nations should be accommodated by international partners.

Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf is one of scores of leaders to speak at the annual General Assembly session at which heads of State and government and other high-level officials will present their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance.
Austrian President urges nuclear disarmament in General Assembly speech

24 September - Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation can only be achieved together, the President of Austria told the United Nations General Assembly, calling also for the Arms Trade Treaty to enter into force as early as possible.

“The continued reliance on nuclear weapons and the limited progress towards nuclear disarmament are of great global concern,” President Heinz Fischer told the Assembly’s high-level debate which started today at the UN Headquarters in New York and runs through 1 October.

“Nuclear weapons should be stigmatized, banned and eliminated,” Mr. Fischer urged, calling for nuclear weapons to be put at the centre of the international community’s attention.

In his speech, the President highlighted how multilateral cooperation can deliver solutions to global problems.

He called the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) a “historic accomplishment” and said he looked forward to its earliest possible entry into force.

Turning to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the sustainable development agenda that will succeed them in the years after 2015, Mr. Fischer noted that Vienna has since 1 July hosted the Office of the Special Representative of the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative.

That initiative aims to achieve three inter-linked global targets by 2030: universal access to modern energy services; the doubling of energy efficiency; and the doubling of the share of renewable energy in the world’s energy mix.

Turning to the Human Rights Council, of which Austria is a member, Mr. Fischer said the country is leading initiatives for the safety of journalists, protection of religious minorities, and promotion of the rights of the child.

He also urged re-enforced diplomatic efforts towards universal abolition of the death penalty, noting that “too many countries still maintain a “retentionist policy towards this cruel and inhuman form of punishment.”

Noting the importance of the rule of law and last year’s meeting on that topic during the 67th General Assembly, Mr. Fisher announced that the Government is considering setting up an Austrian Rule of Law Trust Fund.

The Fund would support international actors in strengthening the rule of law and offer legal expertise or deploy legal experts free of charge to developing countries at their request.

“Austria strongly believes that only an international system based on the rule of law can lead to lasting peace, security, economic development and social progress,” Mr. Fisher said.
In UN address, Latvian leader advocates placing peacebuilding high on post-2015 agenda

24 September - Peacebuilding should feature high on the global development agenda that countries are crafting for the period following 2015, the deadline for achieving the anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the President of Latvia said today in his address to the United Nations General Assembly.

“Fragile, conflict-affected and least developed countries face the biggest difficulties in ensuring sustainable development,” Andris Berzinš told world leaders gathered for the Assembly’s annual General Debate. The annual debate, which draws political officials from around the world to discuss national and international issues, opened today and wraps up on 1 October.

He said that growing evidence shows that progress on the MDGs – which range from slashing hunger and poverty to ensuring access to education and health services – in these States is impossible without first achieving peace and security.

“This leads us to one of the cornerstones of the new post-2015 vision: peace and security are basic conditions for a decent life and for the enjoyment of human rights,” he stated.

The UN is currently working with Governments, civil society and other partners to build on the momentum generated by the MDGs and carry on with an ambitious post-2015 development agenda.

A set of peacebuilding goals, the President stated, should be high on the post-2015 agenda, and the UN should continue to play the leading role in promoting the settlement of disputes by peaceful means.

“Latvia,” he added, “is convinced that the resolution of protracted conflicts in Moldova, Georgia as well as Nagorno-Karabakh should remain high on the international agenda. Efforts to achieve conflict resolution should be increased.”

Costa Rica spotlights contribution of youth, technology, to global development agenda

24 September - Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla-Miranda highlighted in an address to the United Nations today the contribution of young people to the new development agenda through innovation and the use of new technologies.

“Increasingly, innovation, technology, education and culture are recognized as promoters of development, and there is a growing consciousness on the need of actively incorporating youth in these endeavours,” Ms. Chinchilla-Miranda told the General Debate of the UN General Assembly’s 68th session.

“Costa Rica is honoured to have hosted and organized, along with the International Telecommunications Union (IYU), the BYND2015 summit on youth, development, and information and communication technologies.”

Earlier this month, some 700 young people attended the BYND 2015 Global Youth Summit in the Costa Rican capital of San José, and more than 3,000 followed the conference online and contributed their ideas from 43 hubs or workshops in 25 different countries using social media channels.

Ms. Chinchilla-Miranda drew the attention of world leaders to the Final Declaration of the Conference, which urges Governments to provide more flexible, dynamic and open means of governing to reach more people more easily than
presently possible. It also calls for education systems that equip students with not just theoretical knowledge, but with a practical mix of marketable, innovative and relevant skills needed to compete in the global digital economy.

“I symbolically present to you the Final Declaration of the Conference, adopted in our capital on the 11th of this month by thousands of young people from every continent. We believe it will be a very relevant input in the discussion of the post-2015 development agenda,” she said.

Ms. Chinchilla-Miranda also stressed the necessity for the international community to implement a preventive approach not just for conflicts but also to avert the effects of global warming and climate change.

“We cannot remain inactive while global warming increases, ocean levels rise, and the survival of several small island States is threatened,” she said, commending Secretary General Ban Ki-moon’s plan to convene a summit on climate change next year.

“We promote a model of development based upon harmony with nature; solidarity and social inclusion; economic and trade opening; development of our human resources, and innovation.

We realize that development is futile if it is not founded on a profound respect for human dignity and the rights and well-being of the people, including their day-to-day safety,” she added.

Sri Lanka urges UN to study global inequality, failure to lift millions out of poverty

24 September - Citing his efforts to ensure that economic growth benefits all segments of society in his own country, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa today called on the United Nations to study the international community’s failure to improve the lot of the impoverished worldwide.

“According to World Bank projections, by 2015, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia will be home to approximately 40 per cent of the developing world’s population living in extreme poverty,” he told the General Assembly on the first day of its annual General Debate, noting that commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had brought a real sense of hope.

“[Yet these projections] only diminish the sense of our optimism. It is fitting for the UN system to examine the causes for the failure in improving the lot of the deprived,” he said.

The year 2015 is the target date for achieving the MDGs, which seek to slash extreme hunger and poverty, boost access to health care and education, achieve gender equality and environmental stability, and reduce maternal and child mortality and the incidence of HIV/AIDS.

“Reflecting on the work of the UN, matters of a political nature have overridden the most basic issues, which affect the underprivileged and marginalized, who dominate world society,” Mr. Rajapaksa said, noting that while appreciable progress has been made on the MDGs, the results have been uneven among and within countries.

With regard to Sri Lanka, he said his vision has been to distribute the benefits of growth across all segments of the population and prevent inequalities, social exclusion and adverse environmental effects.

He stressed that the post-2015 development agenda, the theme of this year’s 68th General Assembly, must have poverty eradication and accelerated growth in the developing world as its primary goals, but he pointed to the uneven playing field between developed and developing countries with regard to global warming gas emissions.

“Centuries of growth in advanced economies have left little carbon space for the developing world, challenging their growth,” he said. “The thin lines of balancing economic development and protection of the environment will remain a great
challenge in future development policy-setting. “It is therefore critical that developed countries honour their commitments and compensate damage to the environment, on the basis of common but differentiated responsibilities.”

On other issues, Mr. Rajapaksa called for reform of international monetary and financial institutions to express the solid voice of the developing world, decried interference by some in the internal affairs of developing countries, called for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and condemned the United States embargo against Cuba.

Meeting earlier with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Mr. Rajapaksa exchanged views on the post-conflict situation in Sri Lanka and the country’s cooperation with the UN.

According to a readout of the meeting, the Secretary-General noted the Government’s latest efforts to conduct the provincial elections and to implement the recommendations of its Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission. Mr. Ban also addressed the remaining challenges in reconciliation and emphasized the need for a more holistic approach.

**Ukrainian President focuses on sustainable energy in General Assembly address**

24 September - A new, inclusive approach to the sustainable development of energy is needed to ensure the efficiency and safety of all energy sources, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych told world leaders attending the United Nations General Assembly today.

Addressing the General Debate of the Assembly’s the 68th session, he said the new approach must ensure comprehensive consideration of security, social and environmental aspects, particularly in priority areas such as ecological safety, comprehensive environmental conservation and prudent management of water resources.

“Only such approach will facilitate sustainable development of energy, especially as regards efficiency and safety of its nuclear sector,” said Mr. Yanukovych, whose country experienced what is considered the worst nuclear accident in history at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in 1986.

The President noted that next year will mark the 20th anniversary of Ukraine’s accession to the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a non-nuclear weapon State. “By ridding the world of its third largest nuclear arsenal, our country made an unprecedented contribution to the global nuclear disarmament,” he added.

He added that Ukraine will initiate the holding of a thematic conference on nuclear non-proliferation during the current session.

“We keep insisting: security assurances for the States which gave up their nuclear arsenals and countries which do not make part of military unions must be reflected in a legally binding international document,” said Mr. Yanukovych.

He also noted the importance of cyber security, which is becoming “more and more urgent” and would require strengthening control over the Internet against criminal use and against “other dangerous, primarily military ends.”

He said the UN should lead this process as it is “the best instrument for turning Internet into the space of freedom working in the interests and the benefit of all nations over the world.”

Turning to the theme of this General Assembly debate, “Post-2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage,” Mr. Yanukovych said: “Ukraine will keep doing diligently its ‘homework’ towards achieving the eight anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the national level.

The aim of the high-level debate, which wraps up on 1 October, is to discuss accelerated action towards the MDGs, and to discuss which issues should be included the sustainable agenda that will follow in the years after 2015. Political officials and other Government leaders will also discuss a host of other issues of national and global concern.
Among the ways to raise the welfare of Ukrainian citizens, he noted, is the signing this November of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, including the creation of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.

**Prince of Monaco calls for reinforcing UN’s emergency relief office**

24 September - Citing a host of crises, from conflicts to natural disasters, Prince Albert II of Monaco today called for increased resources for the United Nations office that coordinates international relief for humanitarian emergencies.

“The evolution of elements which engender humanitarian emergency situations in effect demands that we examine the means for intervention which our Organisation has at its disposal,” he told the General Assembly on the first day of its annual General Debate.

“Conflicts, natural catastrophes, climate change, environmental degradation: we must acknowledge that the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), to which I express my profound gratitude, must have the necessary means and resources to carry out the mandate with which we have entrusted it.”

OCHA was set up in 1998, replacing the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), with an expanded mandate to mobilize effective humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors to alleviate human suffering in disasters and emergencies, advocate the rights of people in need, promote preparedness and prevention and facilitate sustainable solutions.

In a wide-ranging speech that touched on many of the crises and challenges facing the world, Prince Albert cited the post-2015 development agenda which is the theme of the this year’s General Assembly, the world body’s 68th. He joined many leaders in discussing that and other issues of national and international concern during today’s session of the Debate, which warps up on 1 October.

The year 2015 is the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that set specific goals on poverty alleviation, education, gender equality, child and maternal health, environmental stability, HIV/AIDS reduction, and a global partnership for development, and Assembly President John Ashe has said the current sessions must lay the groundwork for global sustainable development in the years following the end of the current development cycle.

“It is in a sombre international context that we are going to define the post-2015 development agenda, which will set the foundation stone of our Organization’s work and will be a crucial element for basing its political legitimacy for the decades to come,” the prince said.

He also called for limiting human activities that adversely affect the climate and the environment, condemned the use of chemical; weapons and the suffering of civilians in the Syrian civil warm and deplored recent militant attacks in Kenya, Iraq and Pakistan.

“The stakes are high,” Prince Albert concluded. “Those of us who wish to reaffirm the central place of our Organization in international governance must endow it with the means to ensure this leadership role by being ambitious and resolute in our mission.”
As deadline nears, UN officials call for accelerating progress on anti-poverty goals

24 September - With the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) looming, United Nations officials today called on countries to accelerate action to meet the global targets that have spurred the fastest reduction of poverty in human history.

“With less than 830 days to go before the MDG target date, now is the time to accelerate progress – not give up,” said the Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Helen Clark, at a high-level panel held on the margins of the 68th session of the General Assembly.

“Our efforts must focus on progress for the poorest and most vulnerable people and countries, many of whom have been left behind, despite global progress towards the MDG targets,” she said.

Achieving the MDGs will help address global disparities and lay the foundation for the post-2015 agenda, Miss Clark added.

Agreed by world leaders at a UN summit in 2000, the MDGs set specific goals on poverty alleviation, education, gender equality, child and maternal health, environmental stability, HIV/AIDS reduction, and a global partnership for development.

The targets that have already been met include halving the number of people living in extreme poverty and providing more than 2 billion people with access to improved sources of drinking water. Countries have also made great strides on health targets, and are within close reach of achieving them by 2015. These include reducing the mortality rates from malaria and tuberculosis and slashing HIV infections.

“Today, many nations have achieved what could have been considered a dream in 2000 – cutting in half the number of people living in extreme poverty, eliminating gender disparities in school, expanding access to safe drinking water, and improving living conditions for slum dwellers,” said World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim.

“But progress on health, sanitation, and primary school completion is at risk. The challenge before us remains large. It is larger than the capabilities of any single institution. It goes beyond the capacities of most governments alone. We need productive partnerships among governments, the private sector, and civil society to accelerate progress.”

The panel also hosted heads of State from Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Ghana, Tanzania and Tonga, as well Melinda Gates, co-founder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and nine-time Olympic gold medallist and UN Goodwill Ambassador Carl Lewis.

At a separate event today, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appealed to innovators to use their creativity, ideas and inspiration to achieve the MDGs.

“You come from different fields of expertise – but you share the same understanding that we must help the most vulnerable members of our human family so that we can build a prosperous and peaceful world for us all,” Mr. Ban said at the MDG Innovation Forum held at UN Headquarters.

“Let us give hope to the more than 1 billion people who still struggle in poverty. And let us help them reach their potential – so that together we can create the future we want.”
World leaders inaugurate new UN forum to boost sustainable development efforts

24 September - World leaders at the United Nations today inaugurated a High-level Political Forum that aims to inject new energy into the global effort to boost development for all the world’s peoples in a manner that is sustainable for future generations.

The Forum replaces the UN’s Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which concluded its work on 20 September. The Commission was formed after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to generate action on a range of issues, including energy, oceans and sustainable consumption and production.

At the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development – known as Rio+20 – Member States called for the change from the CSD to the High-level Political Forum to ensure that sustainable development tops the agenda of the highest levels of government and is embraced by all actors.

Countries at Rio+20 agreed that progress in prosperity and social well-being – and simultaneous protection of the environment – had not been sufficient at a time when many global challenges threaten to roll back successes in fighting poverty and severe environmental threats such as climate change loom.

At the inaugural launch today, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that the establishment of the Forum is a significant step towards realizing the vision adopted by Member States at Rio+20.

“Your forum is a key platform for examining today’s challenges in a holistic and integrated manner,” he said. “This forum can be the catalyst for a strengthened global partnership for sustainable development, providing political leadership grounded in solid science,” he added.

To further strengthen that effort, the Secretary-General said, he had decided to create a Scientific Advisory Board, including major researchers in varied natural, social and human disciplines. The Board will be established by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

General Assembly President John Ashe pointed out that the international community had made for itself this new High-level Political Forum, or HLPF, just as the 68th session began its discussions on laying the groundwork for the post-2015 development agenda.

“We have created this HLPF for the express purpose of delivering more effectively on our aspirations and agendas at a time when we realize that the practice of sustainability provides the only real bridge from our past to our present and our future, and from our planet to our peoples and our prosperity,” Mr. Ashe said.

The Forum will bring heads of State and Government together every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly to address the challenges of sustainable development. It will also meet annually at the ministerial level, under the auspices of the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Starting in 2016, the Forum will also review implementation of sustainable development by all countries and the UN system, in order to bring about accountability and a focus on action on the ground.

The President of ECOSOC, Ambassador Néstor Osorio of Colombia, stressed that the Forum “could not and should not go it alone,” but should be integrated into the full UN structure. Such coordination was the responsibility of his Council, he said.

“People have a right to expect real results from the new Forum,” said UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Wu Hongbo. “There are real challenges that must be faced.”
“People need jobs, health care and education. And they also need food security, clean air and clean water. They need development that is sustainable, and the Forum has to deliver progress in all of these areas,” he added.

**South Africa calls for level playing field in post-2015 development agenda**

24 September - South African President Jacob Zuma today urged a level playing field for his continent in setting a new global development agenda for the years following the end of the current cycle in 2015, warning that new international demands were impeding Africa’s development.

“We raise this point…because it appears that the global economic meltdown has brought about new developments that are detrimental to the developing world, especially Africa,” he told the United Nations General Assembly on the first day of its annual General Debate, citing a tendency to renegotiate the “rules of the game.”

“New issues are being introduced as prerequisites for development and partnerships which in fact become huge non-tariff barriers. These include the green economy and clean technology,” he said, noting that while these issues are important and need to be addressed, the manner in which they are crafted restrains economic development as they are used as obstacles.

The year 2015 is the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that set specific goals on poverty alleviation, education, gender equality, child and maternal health, environmental stability and HIV/AIDS reduction, and Assembly President John Ashe has said the current session of the Assembly must lay the groundwork for global development in the decades beyond.

Mr. Zuma said such an agenda allows individual regions and States the space to address the development needs peculiar to their circumstances and priorities. For Africa in particular, it should address poverty eradication, income inequality and job creation, focusing on all three dimensions of sustainable development - eradication of poverty through economic development, social development and environmental sustainability.

“Any development agenda beyond 2015 must be based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities in order to equalize the international playing field,” he stressed.

As he and many other leaders of developing countries have done in the past, Mr. Zuma called for reform of the Security Council by 2015 so that the currently 15-member body democratically represent the world’s nations at large.

“The UN Security Council still remains undemocratic, unrepresentative and unfair to developing nations and small States, and disenfranchises the majority of the Member States of the United Nations who form the majority in this General Assembly,” he said. “We cannot remain beholden indefinitely to the will of an unrepresentative minority on the most important issues of international peace and security.

“There has been too much talk about the need for reform, with too little action. We would like to challenge the Assembly today: Let us set ourselves the target to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations in 2015 with a reformed, more inclusive, democratic and representative UN Security Council.”

In an earlier meeting with UN secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Mr. Zuma discussed political developments in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, especially Zimbabwe and Madagascar. They also focussed on Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic, according to a readout issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson.
In General Assembly address, Qatari Amir urges action to end crisis in Syria

24 September - In his statement to the 68th General Assembly’s General Debate, the Amir of the State of Qatar urged an end to the “destructive actions and horrible massacres” in Syria, and called for reform of the Security Council to more objectively deal with such global challenges.

“The…failure to impose the political settlement we all prefer for Syria is due basically to the inability of the Security Council to take the required decision to stop the bloodshed and the continued intransigence of the Syrian regime and its refusal of all regional and international initiatives,” Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani told world leaders gathered at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

He called of accelerating the process of Council reform “in order for it to be more capable of dealing objectively with global challenges and responding to the aspirations of people” and not have decisions monopolized for long periods by one or two states.

In his statement, the Amir said the ability of those responsible for the brutal crimes and massacres in Syria, “which have shocked every human conscience,” to continue enjoying impunity “questions the credibility of the human rights and international legal mechanisms of the international community”.

He said that “the issue is not whether or not Syria possesses chemical weapons... But the issue is the use of such weapons by the regime against its own people.

“The Syrian people have not risen up for putting the Syrian chemical weapons under the international supervision but for getting rid of despotism and corruption and to end the injustice it has been facing,” he added.

The Amir called on “our Syrian brothers to unify their ranks for entering a transitional period that leads to establishing a governing system that guarantees freedom and dignity for all Syrians without discrimination on the grounds of gender, nationality, sect or creed.”

In a meeting earlier today, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reiterated his call for a political solution to the crisis in Syria, according to a UN spokesperson.

He also thanked the Amir for Qatar’s support to the Central Emergency Response Fund. The UN earlier this month released $50 million from the Fund to boost the efforts of humanitarian agencies assisting the growing number of Syrians affected by the crisis.

During the meeting, the two officials also discussed Qatari support for the UN-backed Alliance of Civilizations which seeks to galvanize international action against extremism through the forging of international, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

In his statement, the Amir said that Qatar aims to be a “hub for dialogue and discussion among different parties to conflict but not to be a party in these conflicts.

“We aim also to open windows for cultural and information dialogue between peoples,” he added.

In addition, Mr. Ban and the Amir also discussed today the importance of UN political efforts in Yemen, the Israeli-Palestinian issue, sustainable development and climate change.
Both peace and justice vital to heal wounds of conflict, Colombian leader tells UN

24 September - Stressing the need to ensure justice as well as peace and stability in the wake of long-term conflict, the President of Colombia told the United Nations General Assembly today that transitional recovery efforts must include clear strategies to secure “the best possible satisfaction of the rights of all victims.”

Laying out his Government’s efforts to undo the damage wrought on Colombian society by nearly half a century of guerrilla warfare, President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón said that he hoped that armed groups understood that with a real opportunity to achieve peace, “the time has come to change bullets to votes” and to continue their struggle, but through democratic means.

Mr. Santos Calderón told world leaders gathered for the Assembly’s annual General Debate that while the Government will endeavour to end the conflict according to democratic tradition and within the framework of international law, it will not sacrifice truth, justice and reparation for victims.

He noted that the international community has long struggled to find ways to equally address both peace and justice, as witnessed by the mixed results of the UN tribunals prosecuting war crimes in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, respectively, which have been endowed with immense resources and have only managed to solve a small number of cases.

Colombia was confronting that dilemma “honestly and seriously” and had adopted a strategy for transitional justice, which aims to address the principles of truth, justice and reparations. “We ask you to accompany us in this effort, respecting our choices and trusting our decisions have never [contravened] the international community’s needs,” he said.

While Colombia could not investigate every act that had taken place over 50 years of conflict, nor prosecute every one of those responsible, it could nevertheless build a realistic, honest and transparent strategy that could enable the best possible satisfaction for all the victims, said Mr. Santos Calderón.

“If we understand justice and the fight against impunity as a set of measures aimed at satisfying victims and [not] just as the administration of criminal processes, it is possible to find a comprehensive solution,” he said, referring to such aims as acknowledging responsibility, restoring trust and providing access for reparations. The goal should be to “achieve peace with maximum justice.”

Yet, he said, even with the crucial opportunity before Colombians to ensure lasting peace and justice, the conflict, with all its violence and cruelty, had an even darker dimension: it was being fed by the “poisonous arrow” of drug trafficking. That illicit activity had been the main source of funding for violence and terrorist activity, and while the State must take action against the guerrillas, it must also curb illegal drug production and trafficking.

In that context, he said that Colombia, as Chair of the Summit of the Americas, had led a proposal to debate and explore ways to tackle the drug problem. Further, the Organization of American States (OAS) had conducted studies on the matter. He expected the UN to consider the results at its 2016 special session on drugs.

“If we act together on the drug problem, with a comprehensive vision, devoid of ideological biases, we will be able to prevent much harm and violence,” he said.

Meeting yesterday with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Mr. Santos Calderón discussed the ongoing peace process between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The two leaders also discussed, according to a read out of their meeting, progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as well as Colombia’s contribution to the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.
Slovakian President calls for reforms to international security sector to ensure peace

24 September - The international system must implement security sector reforms to adequately address conflicts and terrorism, as well consolidate peace and the rule of law in post-conflict regions, the Slovakian President told the United Nations General Assembly today.

“We cannot have a secure, safe and stable environment without effective arms control and disarmament procedures in place as the basic instrument for conflict prevention,” Ivan Gašparovic told world leaders on the first day of the Assembly’s annual Debate.

“The signing of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) has shown that the UN has the potential to make history and substantively contribute to increasing security in the world through its shared commitment to taking a responsible approach to arms trading.”

Mr. Gašparovic said Slovakia is prepared to do everything necessary to help the treaty enter into force. The ATT is the first international treaty regulating the global arms trade. It was overwhelmingly approved earlier this year in the UN General Assembly. The vote was the culmination of a decades-long push to halt illegal shipments of weapons such as missiles, combat aircraft and attack helicopters.

He also endorsed other international treaties that would help address security issues such as the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which would ban all nuclear tests in all environments, for military or civilian purposes, and called on the international community to reach an agreement on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism.

“Terrorism continues to remain one of the most serious threats to peace and security. It plays a key role in many conflicts. A majority of its victims are civilians,” he said. “We can find a solution through our joint efforts only, under the UN’s auspices.”

In addition, Mr. Gašparovic emphasized that security sector reform is a key component in post-conflict development and in strengthening the rule of law, and reiterated Slovakia’s commitment to work with the UN to build the Organization’s capacities in this regard.

“If we cannot give people security, safety, education and jobs, they will be quick to draw guns again in desperation,” he said. “There can be no peace without economic stability and prosperity.”

To prevent further conflicts, countries must ensure sustainable development and social stability, two topics which will be addressed during this session of the General Assembly. This has enormous potential to be effective if countries work together, he said, adding that: “Slovakia wants to actively participate in the preparation of development goals beyond 2015 and is getting ready for a new stage in development cooperation.”
Concerned at delay, Ban says Maldives run-off vote should be held as soon as possible

24 September - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today voiced his concern at the decision by the Supreme Court in the Maldives to postpone the second round of the presidential election and said the run-off should be held as soon as possible.

“These are pivotal elections for reaffirming the democratic process in the Maldives,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson. “The people of the Maldives have exhibited great patience and should have the opportunity, without undue delay, to exercise their vote.”

The first round of the presidential election, held on 7 September, had been widely recognized as a success by international and domestic election observers. The second round was scheduled for 28 September.

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

Mr. Ban reiterated that it is “of the utmost importance” that the will of the people be respected in deciding the future of the country.

“The Secretary-General urges all Maldivians to exercise restraint, renew their commitment to the Constitutions and work toward conducive conditions for peaceful, credible run-off polls to take place as soon as possible,” the statement added.

Stable, democratic Middle East critical for global peace, prosperity, King of Jordan tells UN debate

24 September - The international community must intensify its efforts to end the Syrian crisis and other conflicts in the Middle East, maintaining that the region’s transformations will shape global conditions well into the future, the King of Jordan told other world leaders gathered at the United Nations General Assembly today.

“Our region can be, must be, a House of Peace and Prosperity: With strong pillars of good governance and wide-open doors to opportunity, especially for our young people. This is Jordan's blueprint, and we are not alone,” King Abdullah II said.

“But no house can be built when its city is burning,” he added. “And today, the region's fires cannot be ignored. All the world is in their path. To protect the future, our world must respond.”

In Syria, he said, it is time to fast-track a political transition to end the bloodshed, neutralize the threat of chemical weapons, restore security and stability, preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the country and engage all Syrians in building their nation’s future.

He noted that the flow of refugees in his country already equals one-tenth of Jordan’s population and could reach one million – or 20 per cent of the population soon. “These are not just numbers; they are people, who need food, water, shelter, sanitation, electricity, health care, and more.”

Jordanians had opened their arms to those in need, he said. “But I say here and now that my people cannot be asked to shoulder the burden of what is a regional and global challenge,” he stressed.
While acknowledging that international donors had been generous to date, he said, however, more was urgently needed and the world must be resolute that the Syrian parties “abide by international humanitarian law and principles, and allow humanitarian access, into and within Syria, to reach those in need.”

He said that the international community must also work together for a speedy resolution of what he called the region's core crisis, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which, he said, “consumes resources that are needed to build a better future, and feeds the flames of extremism around the world.”

Commending the Israeli and Palestinian leadership for deciding to resume final status negotiations, he said that recent talks show that progress can be made with willing parties, determined United States leadership and strong regional and international backing.

He urged the parties to remain committed and warned against actions that would derail fragile progress toward a two-state settlement based on international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The way forward for region and the whole world, he concluded, depended on mutual respect and concern for the well-being of all.

“With every country that is more prosperous and free, with every neighbourhood that is safer, with every person who has more reason to hope, the entire House of Humanity grows more secure,” he said.

Earlier today, King Abdullah met with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who, according to information provided by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson, expressed deep gratitude for Jordan’s generosity toward Syrian refugees and recognized the need for further support from the international community.

Mr. Ban and King Abdullah also discussed efforts toward the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks as well as UN efforts in the field of sustainable development and climate change, the spokesman said.

**France calls for strong UN resolution to enforce Syria’s surrender of chemical weapons**

**24 September** - French President François Hollande today called for a United Nations Security resolution that would authorize the potential use of force if Syria fails to comply with its agreement to hand over its chemical weapons following the last month’s sarin gas attack on a Damascus suburb.

“France wanted a strong reaction to respond to this appalling crime and to dissuade [President] Bashar al-Assad’s regime from committing new massacres,” he told the General Assembly on the first day of its annual General Debate, noting that this pressure led to Syria’s agreement to give up its chemical weapons.

The divided Council has been unable to adopt a resolution on Syria and Mr. Hollande called on the five permanent members – China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States – to collectively renounce their right to a veto in the case of crimes against humanity.

“France has three demands,” he said, referring to Council negotiations over verification and the destruction of Syria’s chemical stockpiles. “The first is that the text enables the Security Council to take up the issue at any time.

“The second is that the resolution includes measures under Chapter VII in case of Syrian non-compliance with its commitments,” he added, referring to the chapter in the UN Charter that provides for the possible use of military force amid other measures to ensure compliance. “The third demand is that those who committed these crimes must be brought to justice.”

Stressing the need for urgent action to end the fighting, in which he said 120,000 people have been killed and a quarter of
the population driven from their homes, Mr. Hollande said the forthcoming Geneva meeting must not be just a talking shop but must take decisions to install a transition government with full executive powers to re-establish peace, protect every community and organize future elections.

Turning to other hot spots in the Middle East, he noted the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, stressing that these were the only path to peace and a two-State solution with Israel and Palestine living side by side within secure borders. He also referred to hopeful statements by Iran’s new President Hassan Rouhani on engagement over his country’s nuclear programme.

“His words must now be translated into acts,” he said. “What France is waiting for from Iran are concrete deeds that prove that this country has no military nuclear programme even if it obviously has the right to pursue its civil programme.” Iran says its nuclear programme is solely for the peaceful production of energy, but many countries fear it is seeking nuclear weapons.

Turning to Africa, Mr. Hollande cited the threat of terrorism, voicing horror at the “barbarous attack” by militants on a mall in Nairobi, Kenya. But he also pointed to hopeful signs such as the Security Council-backed French and African intervention in Mali to drive out militants and terrorists from the north and restore stability in the West African country.

He called for a similar Council resolution to provide the logistical and financial means for an African force to restore order in the conflict-riven Central African Republic.

“In every field – security, proliferation, development, climate – there is no worse danger than inaction,” he concluded. “The worst decision is not to take one. The worst danger is not to see it. It is the responsibility of the UN to act. And each time it reveals its impotence, peace loses.

“That is why I propose a code of good conduct to for the Council’s permanent members: in the case of mass crimes they must renounce their right to a veto.”

On the margins of the General Assembly, Mr. Hollande met with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with whom he discussed ways to avoid a further spill over of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon. The two men also exchanged views on the situation in the Central African Republic and Mali and the role of France in supporting both nations.

**At UN debate, President of Mozambique urges international support for hotspots**

24 September - In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly’s high-level debate today, the President of Mozambique, Armando Emílio Guebuza, called for international support to some of the hotspots in Africa, noting that development can only occur in a climate of peace and security.

In his statement, President Guebuza told world leaders who gathered for the debate, which started today, that “in seeking solutions for the conflicts in different parts of the world, the multilateral approach based on the principles of the UN Charter must prevail.”

Mr. Guebuza urged international support for Madagascar, which established the dates for the presidential and legislative elections, creating an “opportunity for the conclusion of the political transition process” in the country.

Turning to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mr. Guebuza said stability in the country remains a challenge for the entire region.

He appealed to the Congolese actors to conclude the Kampala talks led by Uganda, and reiterated to all signatories of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region to “honour the tenets of this agreement.”
Mr. Guebuza also called for steadfast commitment to the stability of Guinea-Bissau within the framework of the Chairmanship of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), of which Mozambique is a member.

“We would like to reiterate our appeal to the international community to continue to mobilize needed resources to carry out elections, and above all, to strengthen state institutions,” he said.

The President of Mozambique, whose country last August concluded its mandate as Chair of the South African Development Community (SADC), also called for a lifting of sanctions on Zimbabwe following “successful elections” validated by State institutions and endorsed by the SADC and the African Union.

Turning to the theme of this year’s debate, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the post-2015 sustainable agenda for the years once their deadline is reached, Mr. Guebuza urged the establishment of an agenda based on principles of inclusion, national ownership and shared responsibility.

“In carrying out this agenda, it is important that we extirpate from our vocabulary and from our attitude the dichotomy that attempts to group the members of the United Nations family to which we all belong in two categories: the generous and the deprived people,” Mr. Guebuza urged.

He noted that as the General Assembly continues along its 1,000 days of accelerated action to meet the MDGs, “the inability of a State to meet its development targets conceived and agreed upon in this Magnificent House represents a collective failure of the entire international community.”

Mozambique had participated in the discussion process about priorities for a post-2015 agenda by hosting national consultations with civil society representatives.

In May, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon participated at one of the roundtable events in Maputo, pledging UN support to assist Mozambique in progressing towards the targets.

The nation has made progress in getting most children early schooling, providing its population with access to water and sanitation, and boosting women’s participation in the Government, where 40 per cent of parliamentarians are women.

However, more than half the population is below the national poverty line, more than 40 per cent of children are stunted or undernourished, and HIV/AIDS is still a major challenge, among other issues.

In his statement, Mr. Guebuza also highlighted the country’s commitment to furthering democracy, particularly ahead of the 20 November municipal elections.

In reference to disarmament, Mozambique will host next June the Third International Conference to Review the Convention on the Elimination of Anti-Personal Mines, Mr. Guebuza said, inviting participants to the Conference.

Among other topics noted in his speech, Mr. Guebuza reiterated his country’s support for a two-State solution the Middle East, and urged the lifting of the economic, trade and financial embargo against Cuba.
Bulgaria’s President urges intensified efforts to safeguard human dignity

24 September - The President of Bulgaria appealed for substantial progress in fighting poverty, ending conflicts and preserving the environment under the overall objective of safeguarding human dignity as he took the podium at the high-level debate at the opening of the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly today.

“I firmly believe that safeguarding human dignity is the ultimate goal of the United Nations as indeed of any genuine democracy,” Rossen Plevneliev said as he spoke on a wide range of topics as one of the first speakers in the annual General Debate.

Welcoming stepped-up effort to forge consensus on a new paradigm for sustainable development – the theme for the Assembly session – Mr. Plevneliev compared the current model to a “carpet in which some colours, threads and stitches were missing making it look unfinished, patchy and ragged.”

He noted that one billion people remained in extreme poverty while resource depletion remained irrational and climate change threatened the future.

“We, the countries of the world, must mobilize all available means and resources to finish what we have started in order to achieve truly sustainable results for humanity and our planet,” Mr. Plevneliev said.

Noting also that conflicts continue to rage and human rights continue to be violated, he said his country has already joined with others in urging the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

He welcomed the framework agreement to control Syria’s chemical weapons, but stressed that the issue should not divert attention from efforts to end the suffering by ending the crisis. His country, not far from Syria, had adopted an emergency plan to assist Syrian refugees both in his country and neighbouring States, he said.

Turning to international terrorism, he expressed gratitude for the assistance of other Member States in investigating the deadly July 2012 attack at a Bulgarian airport and he supported finalization of a draft Comprehensive Convention on combating the scourge.

Stressing his country’s commitment to UN goals in a variety of areas, he said that the progress of Europe over the past century in creating peace, security and prosperity following ruinous wars – most recently the Balkans - should be taken as example of what can be achieved when neighbours work together.

He attached particular importance to the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy as a way to ensuring peace and stability in the Black Sea and the wider region.
At UN, Chilean President tells permanent Security Council members to abandon veto

**24 September** - Chilean President Sebastián Piñera today called for profound reform of the United Nations Security Council, increasing its membership, abandoning the veto enjoyed by the five current permanent members, and instituting a super-majority rule for the adoption of major decisions.

“We join in the appeals to countries with the right of veto to refrain from exercising that right in situations of crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide or ethnic cleansing, since doing so prevents the Council from effectively defending the most fundamental values and principles of mankind,” he told the General Assembly on the first day of its annual General Debate.

Chile supports the inclusion of Brazil, Germany, Japan and India as permanent members of the Security Council and the African continent's request for fair representation, he said. Currently the Council consists of 15 nations, five permanent members with the right of veto – China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States – and 10 non-permanent members elected for two-year terms.

But Mr. Piñera stressed that Council reform is not limited to mere enlargement. “It also means abandoning the rationale of vetoes, reflecting an old world that no longer exists, and replacing it by a rationale of special quorums, suitable for this new 21st century world, so that the most important decisions concerning international security, which inevitably affect us all ultimately, can be adopted by large and forceful majorities truly representative of the community of nations,” he said.

“But basically, if we advocate democracy, dialogue and participation when we govern our countries, I see no reason not to apply these same principles and values when we take decisions affecting the whole world.”

Efforts to change the Council’s structure to make it more reflective of an age when the world body’s membership has almost quadrupled to 193 from just 51 at its founding in 1945 have been on the UN agenda for decades but so far without success.

Mr. Piñera also highlighted the importance of the “responsibility to protect” including the use of international force in sovereign countries as a last resort to prevent major human rights crimes.

“This concept considers as a primary duty to protect the population within its borders,” he said. “And if a State cannot or does not want to accomplish with this primary duty, then the international community can intervene within the frame of its three accepted pillars: prevention, support of the international community in this task and the proportional use of force, but always in accordance with the United Nation Charter, as a last resort and when strictly essential to prevent or deter genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity.”

He also reaffirmed Chile’s commitment to democracy, multilateralism and regionalism, and condemned the use of chemical weapons and indiscriminate force in the Syrian civil war.
Nigerian President urges continued international support to fight terrorism

24 September - Addressing today's General Debate of the 68th United Nations General Assembly, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan called for continued international efforts to overcome transborder crimes, such as terrorism and piracy, and promoted the fundamentals of democracy as requisite for sustainable development in Africa.

Noting the recent terrorist attack in Nairobi, Kenya, Mr. Jonathan said that the reign of terror anywhere in the world is an assault on our collective humanity and urged that “we must stand together to win this war together.”

Terrorism is a challenge to national stability in Nigeria, the President said, particularly in the north-eastern part of the country where the militant group known as Boko Haram is active.

“We will spare no effort in addressing this menace,” Mr. Jonathan said, adding that all action is carried out with regard for fundamental human rights and the rule of law.

Turning to piracy, also a form of terrorism, Mr. Jonathan said Nigeria has promoted cooperation to mitigate its impact and consequences. Most recently, alongside the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission to confront the menace of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

Mr. Jonathan also noted that Nigeria adopted the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in April and called for Member States to follow suit.

On the use of chemical weapons, Mr. Jonathan said that Nigeria condemns “in the strongest possible terms” their use in Syria, and urged a political solution “including the instrumentality of the United Nations.”

He also highlighted the threat of nuclear weapons, which are as unsafe in the hands of small Powers as they are in the hands of the major countries. “It is our collective responsibility to urge the international community to respond to the clarion call for a peaceful universe in an age of uncertainty.”

In his statement, Mr. Jonathan, said Nigeria’s desire and determination to actively cooperate for overall well-being make the theme of this year’s General Debate on the eight anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the succeeding post-2015 sustainable development, all the more apt.

He noted that the UN conducted inclusive consultations and surveys with Nigerians as part of the post-2015 process which will be discussed by world leaders this week, including a Nigerian-led event on the MDGs tomorrow on the sidelines of the Assembly debate.

Mr. Jonathan, the first African leader to address the chamber this morning, noted that a post-2015 development agenda is particularly relevant “to us in Africa,” where the challenges of poverty, illiteracy, food insecurity, and climate change continue to engage the attention of the political leadership.

He said that a new Africa is emerging, a “renascent Africa that has moved away from the era of dictatorship to a new dawn where the ideals of good governance and an emphasis on human rights and justice are beginning to drive state-society relations.”

This emergent Africa will require “continued support and partnership of the international community,” said Mr. Jonathan, whose country serves as co-chair on the Expert Committee on Financing for Sustainable Development. He added, however, that Africa no longer a “destination for aid but one that is involved in constructive, multi-sectoral exchanges on the global
stage.”

In his statement, Mr. Jonathan also highlighted the “apparent lack of progress” in United Nations reform, particularly on the issue of the Security Council.

The President of Nigeria, which is seeking election for one of the five non-permanent seats on the Council during 2014 and 2015, today issued a call for democratization of the body for the “enthronement of justice, equity and fairness” and the “promotion of a sense of inclusiveness and balance in our world.”

Mr. Jonathan later met with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, with whom he discussed recent developments in his country, particularly the persistent violence in the north, and the need to ensure that humanitarian aid remains accessible to all civilians.

For his part, Mr. Ban reiterated the UN’s readiness to support Nigeria’s efforts to restore peace and security and to protect civilians in that part of the country.

**Security Council inaction on Syria a ‘disgrace,’ Turkish President tells Assembly**

24 September - Stressing the centrality of a “strong, efficient, and credible” United Nations for ensuring world peace and stability, Turkish President Abdullah Gül today called it a “disgrace” that the Security Council has not ended the civil war in Syria and ensured a stable transition from the current regime.

“The burden of ending Syria’s plight now rests on the shoulders of the international community,” he told the General Assembly on the first day of its annual General Debate, noting that the world’s deepest crises are being spawned by increasingly frequent internal conflicts, and welcoming the agreement to destroy Syria’s chemical weapons as only a first step.

“We must realize that inaction by the Security Council only emboldens aggressive regimes.

We need a UN capable of forcing the perpetrators of brutal actions to submit to justice and the rule of law. Only through such a UN can we achieve the truly peaceful world envisioned by this institution’s founders,” he said, stressing that decisive action is the only way that the UN system will remain relevant and credible.

“The agreement to destroy Syria’s chemical arsenal must not allow the regime to avoid responsibility for its other crimes,” he added, referring to the more than 100,000 people who have died and the over 6 million who have been driven from their homes in the two and a half years since protests erupted against President Bashar Al-Assad.

“It is a disgrace that the United Nations Security Council has failed to uphold its primary responsibility in this case,” Mr. Gül said, regretting that political differences, balance-of-power politics, and geopolitical considerations within the 15-member Council have prevailed over action to end the tragedy.

He noted that the Syrian conflict neither began with the chemical weapons attack which killed hundreds of people in a Damascus suburb last month, nor will it end with an agreement to eliminate them.

On other issues Mr. Gül called for an effective international partnership against terrorism, stressing that the scourge only be defeated “once we get rid of ‘my terrorist/your terrorist’ distinctions.

He decried the emergence of “Islamophobia” as a new form of racism, urging a balance between freedom of expression and respect for religion, called on Israel to accept the establishment of a viable contiguous Palestinian state, and reiterated Turkey’s commitment to a just and negotiated settlement for Cyprus, which has been divides since 1964 when inter-communal fighting erupted between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities.
Mr. Gül also discussed the Syrian crisis in a meeting with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with both leaders agreeing on the need for decisive Security Council action.

**Chemical weapons investigators to return to Syria on Wednesday – UN spokesperson**

**24 September** - The United Nations team probing the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria will return to the country on Wednesday to complete its investigation of pending credible allegations, including the 19 March incident at Khan al-Asal, a spokesperson for the world body said today.

Formally known as the Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, the team – led by Swedish scientist Dr. Åke Sellström – was established by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in March of this year.

The team, assisted by experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), visited the country last month and found “clear and convincing evidence” that Sarin gas was used in an incident that occurred on 21 August in the Ghouta area on the outskirts of Damascus in which hundreds of people were reportedly killed.

In recent weeks, Syria has acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention. As for information about Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles, the UN spokesperson noted that OPCW has not shared such information with the UN investigation team.

The responsibility of verifying the inventory and elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles belongs with the OPCW, the spokesperson stated, adding that this task is beyond the scope of the UN team’s mandate, which is to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons.

**Bangladesh’s garment industry to improve working conditions in partnership with UN**

**24 September** - Nearly 3.5 million garment workers in Bangladesh, recently beset by industrial accidents and a staggering loss of life, will get essential support to improve working conditions, strengthen labour inspection and upgrade building and fire safety at their workplaces, thanks to a new programme in partnership with the United Nations.

“The rapid growth in Bangladesh’s garment industry has provided vital jobs to women and men and is helping to pull them and their families out of poverty. However, there is an urgent need for decisive and collaborative action to make decent work a reality,” stated Guy Ryder, the Director-General of the UN International Labour Organization (ILO).

“This programme will improve conditions of work, especially safety, and help generate sustainable economic growth and investment,” he added in a news release.

The new multi-year programme, carried out in partnership with the Governments of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Canada, will boost the efforts already underway by Bangladesh and its partners in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector.

The RMG sector is vital to the economy of Bangladesh, which exported goods worth $19.3 billion for the 11 months that ended in May 2013 – nearly 12 per cent more than a year earlier.

Among other things, the programme will focus on supporting the Bangladeshi National Action Plan for Fire and Building Safety, developed in the wake of the Rana Plaza collapse this April. The Plan calls for an assessment of all active export-
oriented, RMG factories in Bangladesh to be completed by 31 December 2013.

The Plan is supported by other parallel initiatives focused on the RMG sector in Bangladesh, namely the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh – signed by over 80 leading clothing brands and retailers – and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, a binding five-year initiative undertaken by North American apparel companies and retailers to improve safety in more than 500 factories.

The Netherlands, as the current co-chair of the donor coordination group in Bangladesh, strongly supports the adherence to international labour standards on workplace safety and protection of worker’s rights.

“Never in the history of the garment sector have we seen such an opportunity for improvement of labour conditions. With the signing of this agreement, the Netherlands with the ILO and our fellow donors will empower millions of workers in Bangladesh to live healthy and decent lives,” said the country’s Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Lilianne Ploumen.

ILO noted that during the past year, the RMG industry in Bangladesh has been rocked by several major industrial accidents leading to large-scale worker protests calling for improved building and fire safety, better working conditions and higher minimum wages. These actions have resulted in work disruptions in hundreds of factories.

“The Bangladeshi authorities are responding to these concerns and supporting the programme, which will start with a complete fire safety and structural assessment of all active RMG factories and, where necessary, initiate remedial action,” said the agency.

The programme also has the support of Bangladeshi employers’ organizations and unions. The Government for its part is moving to significantly improve the capacity of its inspection system by equipping and training current and new factory inspectors and introducing oversight to address integrity and increase transparency.

Additionally, the programme will train workers, supervisors and managers in the RMG sector to improve their capacity to ensure workplace safety including the prevention of violence.

**UN rights office calls on Iraq to determine whereabouts of missing Iranian exiles**

24 September - The United Nations human rights office today called on the Government of Iraq to do all it can to ascertain the whereabouts of seven former residents of Camp Ashraf, who have been missing since the facility, which housed Iranian exiles, was attacked on 1 September, leaving at least 52 residents dead.

“We are gravely concerned about allegations that seven former residents of Camp Ashraf, six of whom are reported to be women, were kidnapped during the events of 1 September,” Rupert Colville, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), said at a briefing in Geneva.

“If they have indeed been kidnapped, all efforts should be made to secure their release unharmed,” Mr. Colville added, noting unconfirmed reports that suggest that they are being held at an unidentified location in Iraq and are at risk of being forcibly returned to Iran.

Camp Ashraf was comprised of Iranian exiles, many of them members of a group known as the People’s Mojahedeen of Iran.

More than 3,000 residents have been relocated to Camp Hurriya, previously known as Camp Liberty, while the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) carries out a process to determine their refugee status, and resettle them outside of the country, in line with an agreement signed in December 2011 between the UN and the Iraqi Government.
Camp Ashraf has been attacked several times, making relocation a priority for the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Following the latest attack, the remaining residents were transferred to Camp Hurriya, but the circumstances of the attack remain obscure.

“As three weeks have now passed, we reiterate our call on the Government to do its utmost to shed light on exactly what happened and to identify the perpetrators of these killings,” Mr. Colville said, while welcoming the transfer of the remaining residents to Hurriya.

He added that UNHCR and others shared the concern over the missing former residents and called on the Government to ensure their safety and prevent their involuntary return to Iran.

Also in Geneva today, UNHCR’s spokesperson expressed concern that recent waves of sectarian violence in Iraq threatened new internal displacement in the country.

“Since the beginning of the year, bombings and rising sectarian tensions have displaced some 5,000 Iraqis,” Melissa Fleming said, noting reports from the last two weeks that suggested that over 200 families had fled their homes in a wide range of locations.

“Those displaced so far include Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Shia Shabak, Turkmen as well as Shia Arabs who are in a minority situation,” Ms. Fleming added.

She said that UNHCR and its partners have conducted needs assessments of the newly displaced people and are advocating with the Government for their registration. In coordination with the Government, the agency was helping to ensure them food, core relief items, education and adequate accommodation, along with relevant documents.

Urgent protection needed for displaced persons in Central African Republic – UN expert

24 September - An independent United Nations human rights expert today called for the urgent protection of civilians uprooted by the current crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) which is marked by a virtual lack of security, massive displacement and a dire humanitarian situation.

“I urge the Transitional Government of the Central African Republic to do its utmost to ensure the protection of IDPs and to facilitate the humanitarian response,” said Chaloka Beyani, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

“The situation of all those displaced, who hide in remote areas, including in the bush, in poor sanitary conditions and without access to basic services or clean services is extremely worrying.”

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.

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.

Mr. Beyani noted in a news release that more than four months after the rebels seized power, there is virtually no security in the country, which is seeing widespread human rights violations and abuses, including attacks on the population, massive internal displacement, rape and looting.

As of early September, more than 260,000 people were internally displaced in CAR, including more than 100,000 children.
Most displaced children are not able to attend lessons as schools have been destroyed, closed or occupied by armed groups. Displaced children are also reported to be particularly vulnerable to forced recruitment by armed groups.

The Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council (HRC) is set to hold an interactive dialogue on the situation of CAR tomorrow, while a ministerial-level meeting on the humanitarian situation in the country, co-chaired by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos, will be held in New York.

“I call on the HRC to address the situation of internally displaced people in the country and to make concrete recommendations to that effect,” said Mr. Beyani, who reports to the Council in an independent and unpaid capacity.

**UN envoy urges increased efforts to defeat militant groups in Somalia**

24 September - The top United Nations official in Somalia today urged the international community to redouble its efforts to help defeat militant groups in the country, including Al-Shabaab, which reportedly claimed responsibility for last weekend’s terrorist attack in neighbouring Kenya.

At a press briefing in Geneva, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Nicholas Kay, strongly condemned the attack in Nairobi and expressed condolences to the families of the victims.

According to media reports, some 62 people died and more than 170 were injured during the siege of Kenya’s largest shopping mall, the Westgate. Islamist Al-Shabaab insurgents reportedly launched the attack in response to Kenya sending troops to Somalia to fight the group.

Mr. Kay stressed that security remains the main challenge in Somalia, and called on the international community to support Somali national forces in addressing threats posed by militant groups, adding that they represent not just a national but an international threat.

“None of the progress that we are making in Somalia, in terms of political and institution capacity building, none of that progress will succeed unless the security challenges are met. Security remains the number one challenge and controlling and defeating Al-Shabaab is key to this,” Mr. Kay said. “The Westgate attacks show that the threat from Al-Shabaab is international […] the ideology and the terrorist intent respects no borders.”

Mr. Kay called for an intensified campaign to defeat the group, and said it had to be three-dimensional: military, political and practical. He added that he would request more resources, in particular for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which is in need of helicopters, armed vehicles, and potentially more troops.

The envoy emphasized that an extra investment in Somalia should be seen as very small in comparison to what had been spent in other countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq or Mali. The price of walking away would be far higher, he said.

“There are plenty of challenges still outstanding but there are many grounds for a cautious optimism,” said Mr. Kay, who heads the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM). “Despite this tragedy, and despite this murderous deadly intent shown by Al-Shabaab, in Somalia we have at the moment the best opportunity we have had for a generation to assist that country return to peace and eventual prosperity.”

Somalia has been torn asunder by factional fighting since 1991 but has recently made progress towards stability. In 2011, 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.
UN report highlights technology’s potential to foster inclusion of persons with disabilities

24 September - A report released today by the United Nations and its partners illustrates how information and communication technologies (ICTs) can help give access to resources to persons with disabilities.

The report, “The ICT Opportunity for a Disability-Inclusive Development Framework,” contributes to a better understanding of the extent to which ICTs can enable the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities. It lists challenges that are still to be addressed, while outlining concrete actions to help achieve a disability-inclusive development agenda.

“The use of information and communication technologies should be at the heart of any strategy to promote the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities,” said the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Hamadoun I. Touré. “We have the tools at our hands; the remaining challenge is to expand access to these technologies to all and to make ICTs accessible and affordable for persons with disabilities.”

The report is based on feedback from a global consultation carried out earlier this year in support of the preparatory process for the High-Level Meeting on Disability and Development (HLMDD), which took place at UN Headquarters yesterday.

The consultation gathered over 150 expert inputs from relevant organizations and key individuals from over 55 countries, representing governments, academic institutions, organizations of persons with disabilities, civil society organizations, the private sector and regional and international organizations.

Some of the challenges highlighted in the report include the cost of making ICTs accessible to persons with disabilities, a lack of policies to foster accessible ICTs, and limited availability and use of ICTs in general.

The report stresses that governments play a key role in introducing ICT-enabled solutions adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, and private sector entities can contribute by increasing research and development efforts to develop accessible ICTs. For their part, civil society organizations have a key role in raising awareness of accessibility barriers.

Released during a side event of yesterday’s High-Level Meeting, the report is the result of collaborative input from the UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development, the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs, the International Disability Alliance, ITU, Microsoft, the Telecentre.org Foundation and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

UN human rights office urges Israel to halt mass demolition of Bedouin structures

24 September - The United Nations human rights office today urged Israeli authorities to halt the recent wave of demolitions of Bedouin structures, noting the destruction of this property violates international humanitarian law.

“These mass demolitions raise serious concerns about the prohibition on forced evictions under international human rights law, and Israel’s obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of Palestinians to adequate housing and freedom from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family and home,” said Rupert Colville, spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

In July, OHCHR urged Israel to reconsider a proposed law that would result in the
demolition of up to 35 Bedouin villages, displacing as many as 40,000 members of these communities from their ancestral homes.

However, demolitions began on 19 August and have been carried out by Israeli authorities in at least six different locations, including East Jerusalem. Subsequently, on 11 September all but two residential structures in the Bedouin community of Az Za’ayyem on the edge of Jerusalem were demolished.

The latest wave of demolitions occurred on 16 September, when 58 structures were knocked down, including all residential structures and livestock shelters in the herding community of Mak-hul in the northern Jordan Valley.

According to OHCHR, all 10 families inhabiting the structures were rendered homeless and no alternative housing options were offered.

“Israeli authorities denied the provision of emergency shelter assistance to the community by humanitarian organizations,” Mr. Colville said. “The community remains vulnerable to further demolitions and repeated displacement due to lack of legal security of tenure and the consequent inability to obtain building permits.”

Mr. Colville added that the obligations of Israel with respect to the right of adequate housing of Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory include ensuring access to basic shelter and housing, and refraining from interfering with the enjoyment of these rights.

**Multi-level strategy to fight malaria launched by UN development arm and partners**

24 September - The United Nations and a coalition of partners today launched a comprehensive approach to fighting malaria, a disease which – despite tremendous advances – still kills an estimated 660,000 people each year and poses a major challenge to development.

With the participation of world leaders gathered in New York for the 68th General Assembly, the Roll Back Malaria Partnership (RBM) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) launched the Multisectoral Action Framework for Malaria, which calls for greater coordinated action among different development sectors to tackle the disease, which exacts its deadliest toll in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Framework identifies actions to address the social and environmental determinants of malaria, and calls for current malaria strategies to be complemented by a broader development approach, according to a UNDP news release.

“Malaria is a disease associated with lack of socio-economic development, poverty, marginalization and exploitation. Each of these dimensions has roots beyond the health sector – so a multi-sectoral response is essential if we are to free the world from the burden of malaria,” said Rebeca Grynspan, UNDP Associate Administrator.

According to UNDP, stronger global health partnerships and greater funding in recent years have already resulted in unprecedented progress, with a 25 per cent decrease in global malaria deaths. Forty-three countries have seen malaria cases decrease by more than 50 per cent.

Factors that increase vulnerability to malaria infection, however, often lie outside the health sector, involving housing, education, urban planning, agriculture, transportation and other areas, UNDP said.

For that reason, the RBM coalition and UNDP conducted consultations among more than 70 experts from a variety of sectors to develop an operational roadmap for identifying key steps, expected outcomes, and capacities needed to integrate malaria control into broader development processes.

“The Multisectoral Action Framework for Malaria will guide the global response to malaria in coming years as we develop
the next phase of the Global Malaria Action Plan as well as the post-2015 agenda,” said Fatoumata Nafo-Traoré, Executive Director of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership.

Targeted by the current development framework, the Millennium Development Goals and identified by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as a top priority under his second mandate, malaria affects all aspects of development, costing Africa alone some $12 billion in lost productivity each year, according to UNDP.

**Gender equality, free trade crucial for economic development, says Sweden**

24 September - Gender equality, democracy and free trade are vital for human and economic development as the United Nations seeks to set the stage for the a new battle against poverty and its attendant ills in the decades ahead, Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt told the General Assembly today.

“These areas have the capacity to influence developments in many other areas at the same time,” he said on the first day of this year’s General Debate, stressing the prime role the UN has to play in achieving the anti-poverty Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their successor targets, the post-2015 development agenda, which is the theme of the 68th General Assembly.

The post-2015 agenda aims to set the stage for sustainable development in the decades after the expiry of the 15-year MDGs cycle that seeks to slash extreme hunger and poverty, boost access to health care and education, achieve gender equality and environmental stability, and reduce maternal and child mortality and the incidence of HIV/AIDS, all by the end of 2015.

“It is our firm belief that by ensuring gender equality you also improve a country's productivity, economy and rule of law,” Mr. Reinfeldt said, noting that every year, 1 billion women are subject to sexual or physical violence, every day 800 women die from preventable complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, and legal restrictions prevent women from owning property in many countries while many girls and women are refused access to schools and education.

“Educating girls and women leads directly to an increase in a country's economic output,” he stressed. “Educated mothers place higher value on schooling their own children. Closing the gap between male and female employment rates increases a country's GDP (gross domestic product) substantially.”

On democracy, Mr. Reinfeldt said democratic governance was key to achieving sustainable development, noting that almost one third of the world's population lives under authoritarian rule – “a serious barrier to development.”

“Only when people can freely express their political opinion - and freely participate in a thriving civil society - can they truly participate in the life of their community,” he declared. “This applies also to freedom on the Internet. Only with functioning courts do people feel safe to make investments and develop their businesses.

On free trade and competition he said protectionism is very expensive, raising prices and lowering standards of living. “Let me illustrate this by a striking example,” he added. “According to the World Trade Organization, consumers and Governments in rich countries pay $350 billion per year supporting agriculture - enough to fly their 41 million dairy cows first class around the world.”

In other examples, he noted that when competition has been introduced for mobile phone companies in some countries, the cost of calls has fallen 30 to 50 per cent, while studies show that lowering services barriers by one third would raise developing countries' incomes by around $60 billion.

“And let us also remember how important trade is for peaceful relations,” he added. “To put it very simply, no sales person wants to start a war against a country where it has customers. That would be a bad business strategy. Trade enables peace.”

Yesterday, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with Mr. Reinfeldt, and, according to a readout issued by a UN
spokesperson, the two discussed the conflict in Syria and the importance of a political solution.

The Secretary-General thanked Sweden for its contributions to supporting UN humanitarian aid efforts in Syria, including through a generous response to the refugee crisis, and for the critical assistance provided to the work of the UN chemical weapons inspection team.

The Secretary-General and Prime Minister Reinfeldt also exchanged views on preparations for the post-2015 development agenda and the importance of addressing the challenges of climate change. The readout said that the two officials underscored the importance of the resumption of negotiations to reach a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus.

One of scores of leaders to speak at the annual General Assembly session, Mr. Reinfeldt joins heads of State and Government and other high-level officials to present views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance. The General Debate began today and wraps up on 1 October.

**At UN, Zambian President stresses importance of global partnerships for development**

24 September - As world leaders gathered today at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to focus on laying the groundwork for a new sustainable development agenda, the President of Zambia highlighted the importance of building global partnerships to address issues of poverty and development.

In his statement today to the opening of the General Assembly’s General Debate, President Michael Chilufya Sata said that the importance of the intergovernmental processes on sustainable development “is critical and cannot be overemphasized.”

Mr. Sata and the other General Assembly participants are due tomorrow to discuss ways to accelerate progress towards the eight anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and to “set the stage” for a development agenda after the 2015 deadline.

Ahead of those discussions, he stressed the need for a single set of universally agreed goals reflecting sustainable development priorities which are “actionable, concise and whose implementation will resonate with different development and economic levels of Member States.”

He emphasized the need for such goals to be “prudently balanced” and “effectively integrate the economic, social and environmental” aspects of development.

“To this effect,” Mr. Sata said, “it is necessary to build global partnerships that are supported by commitments towards regional and international cooperation, anchored with mutual accountability, enhanced local private sector and public private partnerships.”

Turning to Zambia’s progress on the MDGs, he noted that the country has made “tremendous progress” on Goal 4, which calls for reducing by two-thirds the percentage of under-five mortality rates, and Goal 5, which calls for reducing by three-quarters maternal mortality ratios.

The national MDG report also indicated that while the challenges are still immense, Zambia has made great strides in its fight against HIV and AIDS, and ensuring that people who are living with the virus receive the best of care and access to social protection services.

The country faces challenges, however, in lowering levels of poverty and unemployment.

“My Government has taken an unprecedented painful step of curtailing subsidies on fuel and maize,” Mr. Sata said, thereby releasing “much needed resources” for programmes that specifically target poverty alleviation.
Mr. Sata is among the scores of leaders to speak at the annual General Assembly session at which heads of State and Government and other high-level officials will present their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance.

**Regulating financial markets is ‘human rights issue’, Argentinean President says at UN**

*24 September* - In her speech to the United Nations General Assembly today, the President of Argentina stressed that regulating the financial markets is a human rights issue.

President Cristina Fernandez said that having a home, job, hope and dignity are fundamental rights, and that citizens become repeated victims of speculators and financial lobbies.

“We see millions of unemployed in the world, a situation similar to what Argentina went through in 2001,” lamented the Argentinean President.

“We have been serial victims of lobbyists, of vulture funds, of those who bought bonds at knockdown prices, and that is the story of Argentina; but in a short time, it could be the story of any other country,” she added.

Turning to the conflict in Syria, the President noted that a large majority of Syrians have died in attacks by conventional weapons.

“They have killed more than 150,000 people and 99.9 per cent of those people have died by conventional weapons, not chemical weapons,” Ms. Fernandez said.

She recalled that at the most recent G20 summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, the question arose as to what difference it made if a person was killed by shrapnel, landmine, missile, grenade or chemical weapons.

“There are not just wars; only peace is fair,” noted Ms. Fernandez.

Stressing the lack of action from the Security Council to reach a political settlement to the Syria crisis, Ms. Fernandez recalled that Argentina held the Council’s rotating presidency during the month of August.

While chairing the Security Council thematic debate on cooperation between the UN and regional organizations on 6 August, Ms. Fernandez said she proposed reforming the 15-member body so that its decisions would be taken by consensus without the possibility of a veto.

Finally, she said she hoped that the new Government in Iran would cooperate with Argentina in relation to the clarification of the attack on the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) in Buenos Aires in 1994.

Ms. Fernandez is one of scores of leaders to speak at the annual General Assembly session at which heads of State and Government and other high-level officials will present their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance.
Providing income to poor household is key to successful development, Malawi says

24 September - Moving income into poor households, not increasing GDP (gross domestic product), is the key to solving poverty and related ills as the world seeks a development agenda to succeed the anti-poverty Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Malawian President Joyce Banda told the United Nations General Assembly today.

“The issues that affect population growth, malnutrition, girls’ access to education, maternal health are all rooted in poverty and particularly lack of income at the household level,” she said on the first day of the annual General Debate, adding that those who suggest the best strategy to achieve the MDGs is to realize GDP growth are presupposing a top down approach.

“If we have to overcome these challenges, we need to promote policies and programmes that bring decent incomes into households,” she stressed. “If we cannot uplift the people that are in our rural areas, as is the case for many developing countries, to earn decent income in the household, the vicious cycle of population growth, malnutrition, maternal risks and poverty will remain with us. If the Post-2015 Development Agenda is to realize its dream, we need to go to the grassroots where the poor are.”

The post-2015 agenda, the theme of the 68th General Assembly, aims to set the stage for sustainable development in the decades after the expiry of the 15-year MDGs cycle, the eight targets that seek to slash extreme hunger and poverty, boost access to health care and education, achieve gender equality and environmental stability, and reduce maternal and child mortality and the incidence of HIV/AIDS, all by the end of 2015.

Ms. Banda said Malawi is on track to achieve four of the eight MDGs - reducing child mortality; combating HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.

“However, we are unlikely to meet the goals for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal access to education; ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women; reducing child mortality and improving maternal health,” she added.

But she noted that Malawi is registering a strong economic recovery through the painful but necessary reforms her Government has undertaken to address political and economic governance problems that she inherited.

“I sought to achieve macroeconomic stability, restore the rule of law, and the observance of human rights,” she said, reporting that foreign exchange and fuel are available, the currency has stabilized, inflation is declining, and industrial production is up from 30 per cent in 2012 to 75 per cent in 2013.

Economic growth is forecast at five per cent this year, up from 1.8 per cent last year and Malawians are once again enjoying their freedoms and civil liberties as enshrined in the constitution, she added.

One of scores of leaders to speak at the annual General Assembly session, Ms. Banda will join other heads of State and Government and high-level officials to present views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance.
Well-managed natural resources can transform African economies, Ugandan President says

24 September - With its own income flow from the exploitation of oil and gas resources, Uganda is now able to transform itself into a modern, sustainable economy, the President of the country told the high-level debate of the United Nations General Assembly today.

“With the resources from oil and gas, we shall be able to fund all our infrastructure needs,” Yoweri Kaguta Museveni said in his presentation on the first day of the Assembly’s annual General Debate. “The future is bright and our forward movement is irreversible,” he added.

Outlining Uganda’s struggle for socio-economic transformation, he said, “our biggest problem was funding; the small colonial modern economy was destroyed by Idi Amin.”

Before the large-scale exploitation of miners, he said, the country had to depend on international funding for development. “Although useful, this external funding was limited, slow in coming, not always focused and erratic.”

Global partnership is still critical for his country, he said, and assistance could still prove useful. First and foremost, he stressed, partnerships should begin by working for economic and political integration of Africa and for market access to the rest of the world.

In that vein, he emphasized African anger regarding “actors who are beginning to make it a habit to ignore African Union positions on African matters.”

A case in point, he said, was the actions of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in relation to the elected leaders of Kenya. “The ICC, in a shallow, biased way has continued to mishandle complex African issues,” he stated. “The ICC should stop…Kenya is recovering. Let her recover.”

Despite of some mistakes by some actors, however, his country had been able to achieve many of the Millennium Development goals, he said, concluding that, “Without any doubt, Uganda and much of Africa are moving forward robustly.”

He is one of scores of leaders to speak at the annual General Assembly session at which heads of State and Government and other high-level officials will present their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance.

Uruguayan President focuses on climate change, environment in UN Assembly speech

24 September - In his address to the United Nations General Assembly, the President of Uruguay today urged the international community to strengthen efforts to preserve the planet for future generations.

Speaking to world leaders gathered at the General Debate of the Assembly’s 68th session, President José Mujica said that “the world cries out for global rules that respect the achievements of science.”

He noted that “with talent and teamwork” man can green the deserts, farm the sea and devise methods to use salt water for farming, among other innovations.

“A world with better humanity is possible, but maybe today the first priority is to save lives,” the President said.
In his speech, Mr. Mujica highlighted the power of the financial systems and the economic fallout which has the greatest impact on ordinary people.

He urged a return to simplicity, with lives founded on human relationships, love, friendship, adventure, solidarity and family, instead of ones with people shackled to the economy and the markets.

Yesterday, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with Mr. Mujica in a bilateral meeting in which the two officials discussed several issues on the global agenda, according to a UN spokesperson.

In particular, Mr. Ban welcomed Uruguay work in support of UN peace efforts, being one of the highest per-capita contributors to UN peacekeeping operations worldwide.

Mr. Ban also expressed gratitude for the country’s support for UN reform through the “Delivering as One” approach which seeks greater coordination and collaboration within the UN system and other national and international development actors when supporting national development efforts.

Mr. Mujica is one of scores of leaders to speak at the annual General Assembly session at which heads of State and Government and other high-level officials will present their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance. This year, the General Debate, which opened today, concludes on 1 October.

President of Switzerland decries return to ‘power politics,’ urges negotiation to solve differences

24 September - Switzerland today expressed concern that in a return to “power politics”, larger States are once again choosing to exercise their power and strength, and reaffirmed that sovereignty and equal rights are the convictions upon which the UN Charter is based.

“I sincerely hope that this trend will be corrected.” the Swiss President, Ueli Maurer, told the 68th session of the General Assembly. “No country imposes its law over that of another country. Problems are not solved by diktat, but through negotiation.”

The President spoke on the opening day of the General Debate, making the point that humanitarian efforts were part of his country’s history and it was an honour for Switzerland to make its neutral soil available for peace talks.

He reminded delegations that it was 150 years ago that the world renowned humanitarian organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was created in Geneva, and both Switzerland and the ICRC shared a tradition of neutrality and humanitarian action.

Going on to speak about the situation in Syria, Mr. Maurer said that serious and systematic violations of international humanitarian law and human rights must not be tolerated – and he called on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

In his address, Mr. Maurer appealed to the Security Council’s permanent members to overcome their differences to “find some common ground.” He reiterated the need for no effort to be spared for a consensus to be reached to allow for a political solution and the resumption of talks in Geneva.

Separate from bilateral talks between Russia and the United States on a framework for the safeguarding and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles, the United Nations-Arab League Joint Representative Lakhdar Brahimi has pressed on with efforts towards the holding of a long-proposed international peace conference on Syria, commonly referred to as “Geneva II”, after the Swiss city in which it would be held.

Mr. Maurer also said global problems need global solutions and the UN should be where that happens. But in order to live up to that role, the UN must be “efficient, innovative and effective,” he added.
Acknowledging that the UN is active in a vast range of areas, the President went on to say, “There is perhaps a risk that it has taken on too much and lost focus.”

According to a readout issued by a spokesman for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the UN chief met today with Mr. Maurer. During the meeting, they discussed the situation in Syria. They also exchanged views on disarmament and on prospects for a concrete outcome from the upcoming High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development.

Mr. Maurer joins a score of other world leaders and high-level officials taking part in the General Debate, which concludes on 1 October. The delegations will present their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance.

**Lebanese President appeals for support to assist hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees**

24 September - Lebanese President Michel Sleiman today called on United Nations Member States to boost their assistance to the hundreds of thousands of Syrians that have fled the crisis in their country, while urging for a political solution to end the conflict.

Calling the Syrian refugee crisis “the most pressing and biggest burden” facing Lebanon, Mr. Sleiman said his country’s resources have been stretched to their capacity, with more than one fourth of Lebanon’s population now made up of Syrian refugees.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of August this year, Lebanon was hosting more than 700,000 Syrian refugees.

While he thanked countries that had pledged donations in January, Mr. Sleiman stressed that these commitments have only been partially fulfilled as needs have dramatically increased.

“As it is not possible to impose on nations – and individuals – the “impossible”…it is important for me to reiterate, from this very rostrum, my call for your States to support the proposals I have already put forth, in order to ease this escalating burden […].” Mr. Sleiman said.

Those proposals include providing sufficient funds to meet the basic humanitarian and livelihood needs of Syrian refugees, consolidating frameworks and spaces to lodge refugees on Syrian territories that are out of reach of the ongoing conflict, and holding an international conference on the issue of Syrian refugees to look for ways to share the burdens and numbers among States.

He also called for support for the International Support Group for Lebanon, which “has placed the issue of the refugees at the top of its priority list – all of this pending the sought political solution for the Syrian crisis, which would ensure a safe and dignified return of the refugees to their country, as soon as possible.”

Mr. Sleiman emphasized that while Lebanon remains committed to Baabda Declaration, which sets out Lebanon’s disassociation from the negative fallout of regional crises. The Lebanese will continue to support friendly countries facing the negative repercussions of external conflicts.

“Not only do [the Lebanese] look up to that assistance out of brotherly and friendly solidarity, but also based on the common responsibility thrust upon the international community as a whole, regarding the problems which pose a threat to regional and global security in general,” he said.

He is one of scores of leaders to speak at the annual General Assembly session at which heads of State and Government and other high-level officials will present their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance. The General debate opened today and concludes on 1 October.
Gabon’s President urges international support for Africa’s fight against terrorism

24 September - Citing the recent deadly terrorist attack at a mall in Nairobi, Kenya, President Ali Bongo of Gabon appealed today from the podium of the United Nations General Assembly for full global support for Africa in the battle against terrorism.

“Africa, which is becoming a target for terrorism, must benefit from the full support and solidarity of the international community in its effort to combat this threat,” he told the Assembly on the first day of its General Debate, noting that poverty nurtures extremism around the world and the battle against poverty must therefore remain at the centre of national policies.

Turning to the post-2015 development agenda, the theme of the 68th General Assembly, Mr. Bongo said attention must be paid to Africa’s priorities, such as energy, access to potable water and sustainable agriculture, as well as the realization of those Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are not met by the target date of 2015.

The MDGs seek to slash extreme hunger and poverty, boost access to health care and education, achieve gender equality and environmental stability, and reduce maternal and child mortality and the incidence of HIV/AIDS, all by the end of 2015, while Assembly President John Ashe says he hopes the focus on the post-2015 agenda will set the stage for sustainable development in the decades ahead.

Mr. Bongo underscored the need for predictable funding for development from public and private sources, the importance of combating climate change and the threat to wildlife and biodiversity, and voiced his concern over conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR), praising the efforts of the UN peacekeeping mission in the former country.

He repeatedly appealed for international support. “Africa cannot face all these challenges to peace and security alone,” he declared. “Its efforts must receive greater support, because the destabilization of Africa will have implications for other regions.”

Regional integration key to national, global progress, leader of Bosnia and Herzegovina says

24 September - The Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina told the high-level debate of the United Nations General Assembly today that regional cooperation remains the focus of his country as it looks toward furthering its relationship with the European Union and addressing global economic, security and environmental challenges.

“The aspiration of Bosnia and Herzegovina to become EU member is based upon wide political consensus,” Chairman Željko Komšić said on the first day of the Assembly’s annual General Debate, which runs through 1 October. He joins a host of world leaders and high-level officials who will also present their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance.

“Based on the direction and foreign policy activities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, our focus remains on furthering our relationship and institutional relationship with the EU, according to the Stabilization and Association Agreement and its full implementation, he said.

In that light, he outlined his country’s efforts on human rights, preventing impunity for war crimes, integration into security structures of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and negotiations for accession to the World Trade Organization.
“Bosnia and Herzegovina,” he added, puts strong emphasis on regional and subregional cooperation and dialogue between neighbouring countries whose cultures and traditions have been present in the Balkans for centuries, and who are currently at different stages of transition and democratic reforms.”

The potential for regional economic ties, he said, is especially strong in the areas of industry, tourism, agriculture and energy.

In contributing to the global effort to define the future development framework to face economic, social and environmental challenges, regional cooperation is also critical, “considering that the above-mentioned three aspects of sustainable development cross national borders,” he said.

Stressing Bosnia and Herzegovina’s adherence to EU policy goals on sustainable development, he said that “economic or political interests must not be a hurdle to global consensus as the true beginning of the global fight for preservation of the natural balance of planet Earth.”

Beyond regional cooperation, he said that facing global challenges required a strong multilateral approach, and he urged reform and strengthening the United Nations for that purpose, through consensus action.

“It is up to us to make the world Organization stronger and more efficient, as it is only the UN, the most comprehensive and inclusive Organization, that can help bring progress and well-being to our planet,” he said.

**Iran’s new President proposes immediate ‘time-bound’ talks on nuclear issues**

24 September - From the podium of the United Nations General Assembly, Iran’s new President, Hassan Rouhani, today foreswore the production of nuclear weapons, reasserted his country’s right to peaceful nuclear enrichment and proposed immediate “time-bound” talks to resolve the issue.

“I declare here, openly and unambiguously, that, notwithstanding the positions of others, this has been, and will always be, the objective of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” he told the General Assembly on the first day of its General Debate, speaking hours after United States President Barack Obama told the same gathering that he was directing US Secretary of State John Kerry to pursue a diplomatic course with Iran on the matter.

“I listened carefully to the statement made by President Obama today at the General Assembly. Commensurate with the political will of the leadership in the United States and hoping that they will refrain from following the short-sighted interest of warmongering pressure groups, we can arrive at a framework to manage our differences,” Mr. Rouhani said.

Iran’s nuclear programme has been an international concern ever since the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported in 2003 that it had committed numerous breaches of its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) safeguards agreement in a deliberate counter-effort over many years to conceal material, facilities and activities that should have been declared.

These covered the entire spectrum of the nuclear fuel cycle including experiments in enriching uranium and separating plutonium - potential ingredients for nuclear weapons. Throughout, Iran has insisted that its programme is solely geared to the peaceful production of energy.

“Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction have no place in Iran’s security and defence doctrine, and contradict our fundamental religious and ethical convictions,” Mr. Rouhani said. “Our national interests make it imperative that we remove any and all reasonable concerns about Iran’s peaceful nuclear programme.”

But he said his country’s right to enrichment inside Iran and enjoyment of other related nuclear rights must be accepted and respected, stressing that its nuclear technology, including enrichment, has already reached industrial scale.
“In this context, the Islamic Republic of Iran, insisting on the implementation of its rights and the imperative of international respect and cooperation in this exercise, is prepared to engage immediately in time-bound and result-oriented talks to build mutual confidence and removal of mutual uncertainties with full transparency,” he said, criticizing those who speak of a military option being on the table.

He stressed that his own recent election represents “a clear, living example of the wise choice of hope, rationality and moderation” by the Iranian people, condemned coercive economic and military policies and practices geared to the preservation of old superiorities, and dismissed the imaginary so-called “Iranian threat.”

“Iran poses absolutely no threat to the world or the region. In fact, in ideals as well as in actual practice, my country has been a harbinger of just peace and comprehensive security,” he said, adding that Iran seeks constructive engagement with other countries based on mutual respect and common interest, and within the same framework does not seek to increase tensions with the United States.

Turning to issues in the Middle East, Mr. Rouhani deplored the “brutal repression” of the Palestinian people, calling it structural violence. “Palestine is under occupation; the basic rights of the Palestinians are tragically violated, and they are deprived of the right of return and access to their homes, birthplace and homeland,” he said. “Apartheid as a concept can hardly describe the crimes and the institutionalized aggression against the innocent Palestinian people.”

On the “human tragedy” of Syria, he said there is no military solution, called for a quick end to the killing of the innocent, condemning any use of chemical weapons but welcome Syria’s acceptance of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

He deplored terrorism and the killing of innocent people as “the ultimate inhumanity of extremism and violence… Terrorism is a violent scourge and knows no country or national borders. But, the violence and extreme actions such as the use of drones against innocent people in the name of combating terrorism should also be condemned,” he said, also condemning the “criminal assassination” of Iranian nuclear scientists.

Summing up his overall view, Mr. Rouhani concluded with a message of hope. “Notwithstanding all difficulties and challenges, I am deeply optimistic about the future,” he declared. “I have no doubt that the future will be bright with the entire world solidly rejecting violence and extremism.

“Prudent moderation will ensure a bright future for the world. My hope, aside from personal and national experience, emanates from the belief shared by all divine religions that a good and bright future awaits the world.”

Education is ‘the key’ to development opportunities, Paraguayan President tells Assembly

24 September - In his address to the United Nations General Assembly’s high-level debate today, the President of Paraguay highlighted the importance of education and stressed that opportunities, not hand-outs, helped countries achieve progress in a dignified manner.

“Education is the key,” President Horacio Manuel Cartes Jara said. He is one of a host of leaders to speak at the annual General Assembly session at which heads of State and Government and other high-level officials will present their views and comments on issues of individual national and international relevance. The debate runs in New York through 1 October.

“The central issue is the quality of learning as a means of overcoming the geopolitical constraint of backwardness and a lack of opportunity, he added referring to Paraguay’s geographic location as a land-locked country.

He noted that improving the quantity and quality of education is a fundamental premise of his new Government, which
would lead to a longer-term goal of development and opportunity for Paraguayans and internationals alike.

“The new rules that govern the world therefore represent an access to the ocean of development for my country,” Mr. Cartes concluded.

On behalf of Paraguay, he asked the international community for “opportunities to achieve progress in a dignified manner, not for hand-outs.”

He added that his country wanted to “work and study and truly become a land of opportunity, of investment and prosperity, with security, formality, reliability and foreseeability.”

Today’s speech is the first time that Mr. Cartes, who was elected last month, participated in the high-level General Assembly debate.

He said the 21 April election process represents a “new direction,” where Paraguayans freely altered from one political party to another for only the second consecutive time in more than 200 years.

Among his other priorities, he said, is poverty alleviation: “It is incomprehensible that a nation so rich in resources has so many poor.”

He pledged that “no quarter will be given” in the fight to reduce the country’s poverty indicators as much as possible in the shortest time possible. “Things are going to improve, and not merely through assistance, but also by ensuring human dignity,” Mr. Cartes said.

Poverty alleviation is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) due to top tomorrow’s discussion at the Debate, along with plans for a post-2015 sustainable development agenda.