UN, humanitarian partners sound global alarm on behalf of Syria’s children

24 February - Moved by the dire plight of more than 5 million war-traumatized Syrian children – both inside and outside the country – United Nations agencies and their partners today joined forces to urge the world to demand an end to the “relentless horror and suffering” those children face before an entire generation is lost.

The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Mercy Corps, Save the Children and World Vision have issued an impassioned appeal to engage at least 1 million voices of support before the war in Syria reaches the end of its third year on 15 March.

The organizations are calling for the public to join in a massive call for action, hosted on www.change.org (http://bit.ly/nolostgeneration). The appeal is directed at all those who have the responsibility and the ability to bring an end to the suffering of children and safeguard their future.

This call to action is the latest endeavour by the UN and its humanitarian partners to sound a global alarm about the impacts of the ongoing bloodshed, homelessness and missed education on Syrian children amidst a civil war that has killed well over 100,000 people and driven an estimated 9 million others from their homes since fighting erupted between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and various groups seeking his ouster nearly three years ago.

According to UNHCR, there are currently more than 2.5 million refugees registered in the region, nearly half of whom are under 18 years of age: some 932,000 in Lebanon; 574,000 in Jordan; some 613,000 in Turkey; 223,000 in Iraq; and about 134,000 in Egypt.
On 7 January, UNICEF, UNHCR and many of the same organizations appealed for $1 billion to save millions of Syrian children from becoming a lost generation, doomed by the civil war in their country to a life of despair, diminished opportunities and broken futures.

"The future for these children is slipping away, but there is still a chance to save them," UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres had stated at the unveiling of the “No Lost Generation” initiative in Geneva. "The world must answer this crisis with immediate, massive international support."

Last Thursday, UNICEF launched a $2.2 billion appeal to help nearly 60 million children in crisis situations worldwide, with the majority of the funds destined to tackle the impact of the crisis in Syria and the sub-region. Almost 40 per cent, or $835 million, will be earmarked for immunizations, as well as water and sanitation, education, and protection projects.

Today’s call to action comes in the wake of the adoption on Saturday of a resolution by the UN Security Council demanding that “all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines and across borders.” The wide-ranging text strongly condemned “grave violations and abuses committed against children” in contravention of international law.

Along with the immediate protection of children, today’s appeal stresses the importance of breaking the cycle of violence and providing children and young people with the support they need now to play a constructive role in the future peace and stability of Syria and the region.

The five demands set out by the organizations are: an end to violence against the children of Syria backed by calls on all those involved in the fighting to commit to resolving the conflict peacefully; an end to blocking of humanitarian assistance; an end to attacks on humanitarian workers and facilities – especially schools and hospitals; a renewed commitment to reconciliation and tolerance – led by all communities affected by the conflict, involving children and young people; and more investment in the education and psychological protection of all children affected by the conflict.

**UN kicks off International Year to raise profile of small island developing countries**

**24 February** - While drawing attention to some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, the International Year of Small Island Developing States – which kicked off today at the United Nations – is also a chance to address increasing environmental degradation, and social and economic marginalization in those countries.

““This Year takes place at a time when the vast majority of islands are combating the ravages of climate change, and some, like the Maldives are literally sinking because of it,” the current UN General Assembly President, John Ashe, said during a ceremony that included singing, dancing and story-telling.

The Year – the first time the General Assembly designated an international year for a group of countries – is an opportunity for the international community “to share the many reasons why the global family of nations can and must act to support, protect, preserve and ensure the sustainable development of SIDS,” Mr. Ashe noted referring to the acronym for Small Island Developing States.

Today’s launch at UN Headquarters in New York coincides with a preparatory meeting for the Third International Conference on SIDS, which will be held in Apia, Samoa in September.

The Conference will take place during the same month that the General Assembly will devote its annual high-level segment to deliberations on the sustainable development agenda beyond 2015, the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Under the theme of “sustainable development of small island States through genuine and durable partnerships,” the
conference in Samoa will seek to ensure economic growth and social development while protecting the environment and increasing countries’ resilience. There are also side events planned on issues such as youth, national debt and environmental protection.

“The challenges that small island developing States are facing are challenges that all countries should be concerned about,” said the Secretary-General of the Conference and head of the UN Department of Economic and social Affairs, Wu Hongbo, who also participated in today’s launch. But because of their unique locations, small islands are particularly vulnerable, he added.

For example, the hurricane season has devastating impacts on lives and property, particularly in countries which see an increasing number of cycles and decreasing rainfall.

In Samoa, the 2012 Cyclone Evan caused about $400 million worth of damage, or roughly a quarter of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP).

“When you come to Samoa, we will show you the new communities of people who were shifted up from the coastal communities inland,” Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi told journalists in a briefing alongside Maxine Pamela Ometa McLean, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Barbados.

“Our greatest fear this year is that we do not have a repetition before the Conference,” the Prime Minister said.

“Climate change represents a grave threat to the survival and viability of a number of low-lying nations,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his address at the launch of the International Year, adding that he has brought the call for global environmental stewardship to officials at the UN and in capitals around the world.

To galvanize support for addressing climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mobilizing political will, Mr. Ban will convene a Climate Summit on 23 September in New York. “I invite all leaders to attend the Summit and announce bold actions,” he said.

UN Member States agreed two years ago to support the 51 highly vulnerable small island developing States (SIDS) – a group that was politically recognized at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, underscored at a major international conference in Barbados in 1994 and again at a follow-up meeting in Mauritius in 2005.

The group of States share similar sustainable development challenges, including small but growing populations, limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, excessive dependence on international trade, and fragile environments.

Its economies face challenges from high costs in communication, energy and transportation, as well as lacks of infrastructure and little to no opportunity to create economies of scale.

In an earlier in-depth interview with the UN News Centre, Gyan Chandra Acharya, who in his role as a UN Under-Secretary-General officially represents SIDS in the UN system, stressed the importance of conferences, such as the upcoming one in Samoa, in “sensitizing the international community to the challenges these countries face.”

“It is first and foremost the responsibility of the countries concerned to have strong leadership and good governance, as well as to mobilize domestic resources for these purposes. But in today’s interrelated and globalized world, they cannot do everything on their own,” Mr. Acharya said. “They have to look for international support because of their lack of capacity, lack of institutions, and of course, lack of resources.”

The preparatory meetings for the Conference will continue in New York through Wednesday.
New anti-homosexuality law in Uganda violates basic human rights, stress UN officials

24 February - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay have spoken out against the anti-homosexuality law signed into force today in Uganda, saying it violates basic human rights and endangers lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in the country.

The law criminalizes and imposes life imprisonment for homosexuality, same-sex marriage and “aggravated homosexuality,” according to a news release issued by the High Commissioner’s Office (OHCHR).

“Disapproval of homosexuality by some can never justify violating the fundamental human rights of others,” Ms. Pillay said. “This law will institutionalize discrimination and is likely to encourage harassment and violence against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation.

“It is formulated so broadly that it may lead to abuse of power and accusations against anyone, not just LGBT people,” she warned.

Ms. Pillay stressed that Uganda is obliged, both by its own Constitution and by international law, to respect the rights of all individuals and to protect them from discrimination and violence.

“This law violates a host of fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom from discrimination, to privacy, freedom of association, peaceful assembly, opinion and expression and equality before the law – all of which are enshrined in Uganda’s own Constitution and in the international treaties it has ratified.”

The High Commissioner expressed deep concern that the law could also threaten the critically important work of human rights defenders in the country, urging the Government to take immediate steps to ensure that they are not prosecuted for their advocacy.

Mr. Ban’s spokesperson said the Secretary-General is “seriously concerned” about the negative impact of the new law and shares the High Commissioner’s view that it violates human rights.

“It will institutionalize discrimination, restrict the vital work of human rights activists, and could trigger violence. It will also hamper potentially life-saving efforts to stop the spread of HIV,” Martin Nesirky told reporters in New York.

Mr. Ban has appealed for the complete and universal decriminalization of homosexuality, still a criminal offence in some 76 countries, stressing that human rights must always trump cultural attitudes and societal strictures.

Mr. Nesirky added that the Secretary-General intends to raise the anti-homosexuality law in his meeting today with the Permanent Representative of Uganda to the UN, Richard Nduhuura.
On visit to besieged camp, UN official urges unhindered access for all civilians in Syria

24 February - A senior United Nations official said today he was shocked by what he saw during a visit to a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, and underscored the need for full and unhindered access to all conflict-affected communities in the country.

“I am deeply disturbed and shaken by what I observed today,” said Filippo Grandi, the Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

“The Palestine refugees with whom I spoke were traumatized by what they have lived through, and many were in evident need of immediate support, particularly food and medical treatment,” said Mr. Grandi, who entered the Yarmouk camp during the resumption of UNRWA’s humanitarian aid distribution this morning.

Prior to the armed conflict in Syria, which began in March 2011, Yarmouk – a suburb just south of Damascus – was home to over 160,000 Palestine refugees. Since December 2012, fighting has caused at least 140,000 Palestine refugees to flee their homes in Yarmouk, as armed opposition groups established a presence in the area, with Government forces controlling the periphery.

Yarmouk camp has been sealed since July 2013, resulting in acute and widespread deprivation, including severe malnutrition, while civilian residents are constantly exposed to the threat of death, injuries and trauma of the armed conflict.

After partial humanitarian access was granted on 18 January and 20 February, UNRWA had successfully distributed 7,000 food parcels, 10,000 polio vaccines and a range of other medical supplements to civilians inside the camp.

UNRWA welcomed the support of Syrian authorities to resume distribution today after being suspended for several days. During his three-day visit to Syria, Mr. Grandi was encouraged by assurances given by the authorities that access will be maintained and expanded, and ultimately lead to the safe return of Palestine refugees to their homes.

“We hope that the positive developments in Yarmouk can give momentum to peaceful dialogue between all parties so that there can be humanitarian access for all civilians in Syria who have suffered enough,” he said.

Ban calls on Ukrainians to find peaceful way forward amid current turmoil

24 February - Amid the rapidly unfolding events in Ukraine, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called for an inclusive political process to enable the country to emerge from its current crisis, one which reflects the aspirations of its people and preserves its unity and territorial integrity.

“He reiterates his call for non-violence and urges all Ukrainians to express their differences peacefully and through dialogue, and to seek a durable solution through compromise,” Mr. Ban’s spokesperson said in a statement.

“He has remained in continual contact with key actors on how to support a peaceful way forward for Ukraine at this time of transformation.”

On Saturday, Members of the Parliament of Ukraine – which has been witnessing mass protests since last November – voted to remove President Viktor Yanukovych, and an arrest warrant has reportedly been issued for his arrest. The move comes after more than 100 people were killed last week in the latest wave of deadly clashes in the capital, Kiev.
Mr. Ban called for an inclusive political process that reflects the aspirations of all Ukrainians and preserves Ukraine’s unity and territorial integrity, said his spokesperson.

“In order to bring about a stable and prosperous future for Ukraine, the Secretary-General calls for a firm commitment, by all concerned, to uphold the key principles of democracy and human rights and thereby create a conducive environment for free and fair elections.”

The spokesperson added that, to assure Ukrainians of the support of the UN and the wider international community, Mr. Ban has sent his senior advisor, Robert Serry, to the country.

“The Secretary-General expects all key international actors to work collaboratively to help Ukrainians at this challenging time in their country’s history.”

In his meeting with the new Speaker of the Parliament, Oleksander Turchinov, Mr. Serry conveyed the Secretary-General’s solidarity with all Ukrainians and his commitment to assist a Ukrainian-led inclusive governance process.

**UN hosts meeting with Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot negotiators**

24 February - “Substantive discussions” started today in the resumed talks aimed at reaching a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem, a United Nations spokesperson confirmed, following a meeting today between Greek Cypriot negotiator Andreas Mavroyiannis and his Turkish Cypriot counterpart, Kudret Özersay.

“They completed their exchange of views on process and started substantive discussions on issues connected to different chapters,” said the spokesperson for the Secretary General’s Good Offices Mission in Cyprus.

The meeting at the UN Protected Area in the capital, Nicosia, comes more than a week after Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Dervis Eroglu met in the same location to finalize a joint communiqué and formally re-launch talks between both sides.

The UN has been facilitating talks between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leadership, with a view to the eventual establishment of a federal government with a single international personality, consisting of a Turkish Cypriot Constituent State and a Greek Cypriot Constituent State, each of equal status.

The UN also maintains a peacekeeping force in Cyprus, known as UNFICYP, which was deployed in 1964, when inter-communal fighting erupted on the Mediterranean island.

Discussions between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot negotiators are set to continue next week.
Valuing natural resources critical to Africa's 'green economy' growth - UN

23 February - The next wave of investment and innovation in Africa will be driven by the need for new energy resources, wealth generation and job creation, the head of the United Nations environment agency told regional leaders, making a case for the need to place value on natural resources.

“As the continent undergoes such unprecedented development, wealth accounting and the valuation of ecosystem services are critical to Africa's future growth,” Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, Achim Steiner, told the high-level African ministerial conference on green economy in Oran, Algeria.

Natural accounting and valuation in not a fringe activity, he stressed, but a cornerstone of wealth upon which sustainable, equitable and prosperous societies will be built.

Natural capital, which encompasses resources from trees to water to fish, is a critical asset in low-income countries where it makes up around 36 per cent of wealth, according to recent World Bank estimates.

“An inclusive green economy has the potential to improve human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities,” Mr. Steiner told the political leaders yesterday.

In a green economy, growth in income and employment is driven by public and private investment that reduces carbon emissions and pollution, enhances energy and resource efficiency, and prevents the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

“These investments need to be catalyzed and supported by targeted public expenditure, policy reforms and regulation changes,” Mr. Steiner told an audience that included actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, the founding Chair of the non-governmental organization, R20 Initiative.

The conference is being held as the international community is crafting a new post-2015 development agenda to succeed the eight anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The meeting also comes ahead of the first global conference on Partnerships for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) to be held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in early March to support and promote the adoption of the green economy at the international level.

Also Saturday, the UN-backed Green Climate Fund agreed on guidelines that will shape its work and activities. The Fund is intended to be central tool to finance climate change action, both adaptation and mitigation, in developing countries.

Among the decisions made at the meeting in Indonesia, its Board agreed that the Fund would aim for a 50-50 balance between adoption and mitigation; would aim for a floor of 50 per cent of the adaptation allocation for vulnerable countries; to maximize engagement with the private sector; and to define its gender action plan in October 2014.

The Board, comprised of 24 members from developing and developed countries, also discussed how to shape its work on low-carbon and climate-resilient development, among other topics.
UN chief condemns armed attacks amidst Thailand's power struggle

23 February - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called for an immediate end to escalating violence in Thailand, and urged authorities to bring those responsible to justice.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York, Mr. Ban condemned the aggression, which included armed attacks this weekend against anti-Government protesters. At least two children where killed in the attacks.

“The Secretary-General believes strongly that there should be no place for violence by any side in resolving political differences and disputes,” his spokesperson stressed, adding that Mr. Ban is ready to assist in any way possible.

The top UN official has called on all sides to respect human rights and the rule of law, prevent any new attacks and “engage in meaningful dialogue” toward ending the crisis and advancing reform.

The Thai protesters are reportedly seeking to overthrow Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's administration and implement anti-corruption reforms. Authorities imposed emergency security measures last month.

Afghans must ensure next election is credible, urges UN official

22 February - Ahead of Afghanistan's national elections, the top United Nations official in the country is calling on Afghan authorities and independent electoral bodies to ensure the polls are credible, while also urging the Taliban to stop attempts to disrupt the electoral process.

“My message [to the Taliban] directly or indirectly, allow the people to vote. This is their right. These are your people. This is your country as well,” the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, said in an interview with Tolo TV.

“My second appeal, allow also those, not only those that will vote, but the candidates that campaign, election workers to be able to work,” added Mr. Kubiš, who is also the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Civilian casualties in Afghanistan rose by 14 per cent in 2013, UNAMA reported earlier this month. Findings also showed that more women and children were killed or injured in conflict-related violence since 2009.

“Stop killing civilians,” Mr. Kubiš said during the interview, addressing the group directly.

Acknowledging that Afghanistan faces major security challenges, the Special Envoy believed that “everything will be done to ensure that the polling stations will open and [be] accessible to the people. Everything will be done to ensure that the security environment, to the extent possible, will be there, but we know how the situation is.”

Mr. Kubiš expressed confidence in the ability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to ensure “the right possible enabling environment for having the elections throughout the country.”

Overall, he said he was “reasonably satisfied” with the preparations for the 5 April polls when voters will elect a president from among 11 candidates. The current two-term president, Hamid Karzai, will not be eligible to run.

In addition, voters will select members for the 34 councils, one from each province, whose membership ranges from nine to 29 members, depending on population. More than 2,700 candidates are cleared to run in this election.
Mr. Kubiš said that it was “very encouraging to see the first elections that are fully in the hands of Afghans”. The international community has said it views these elections as central to Afghanistan's stable and sustainable political transition. “Afghanistan is doing well,” he stressed.

He underlined, however, the need to make sure that all electoral processes are “as clear as possible, as correct as possible, as inclusive as possible”.

“The success and satisfaction with the results of elections are depended on the credibility of the process and preparations,” he added.

UNAMA does not formally have a role in the Afghan-led, Afghan-managed electoral process, but has been supporting authorities and the independent electoral bodies by advising on election-related matters and providing capacity building and technical support, Mr. Kubiš said.

Unanimously approved, Security Council resolution demands aid access in Syria

22 February - The United Nations Security Council today unanimously approved a resolution to boost humanitarian aid access in Syria, a move Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said can ease some civilian suffering, if it is implemented quickly and in good faith.

Through Resolution 2139 (2014), the Council demanded "that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines and across borders”.

The 15-member Council also called for an immediate end to all forms of violence in the country and strongly condemned the rise of Al Quida-affiliated terror.

Members insisted that all parties cease attacking civilians, including through the indiscriminate use of weapons in populated areas, such as shelling and aerial bombardment with barrel bombs, whose use has been condemned by senior UN officials.

Mr. Ban, who participated in the rare Saturday meeting, welcomed the resolution but added that it "should not have been necessary" as humanitarian assistance is not something to be negotiated but allowed by virtue of international law.

He expressed profound shock that both sides are besieging civilians as a tactic of war, and noted that reports of human rights violations continue, including massacres, as well as sexual and gender-based violence against children.

In the resolution, the Council strongly condemned the widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by the Syrian authorities, and urged all parties involved in the conflict to lift sieges of populated areas, including in Aleppo, Damascus and Rural Damascus, and Homs.

They also underscored the importance of medical neutrality and demanded the demilitarization of medical facilities, schools and other civilian facilities.

After the Security Council meeting, the authors of the adopted text, Ambassador Gary Quinlan from Australia, Luxembourgs Sylvie Lucas, and Prince Zeid Raad Zeid Al-Hussein, Permanent Representative of Jordan, highlighted the Council's commitment to take further steps in case of non-compliance with the resolution.

Ambassadors Gary Francis Quinlan (Australia), Prince Zeid Ra’ad Zeid Al-Hussein (Jordan) and Sylvie Lucas (Luxembourg) brief reporters. Credit: UNTV

The Council has asked that Mr. Ban submit a report to the members every 30 days from today specifying progress made.
towards the resolution's implementation.

Today's text builds on the Presidential Statement adopted four months ago, which stressed the need for immediate action to protect civilians and give access to people in need.

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos said she hopes the passing of the resolution will facilitate delivery of aid. In a statement after the adoption, she underscored the importance of protecting ordinary people who have been bearing the brunt of the violence, particularly children.

Earlier this month, Ms. Amos noted that despite modest progress on the humanitarian front, the UN and partners have not been able to reach the most vulnerable people in the country.

She underscored her plea to Council members to do everything they can to use their influence over the parties to this appalling conflict, to ensure that they abide by humanitarian pauses and ceasefires, give humanitarian actors sustained and regular access, commit, in writing, to upholding international humanitarian law, allow systematic cross-line access, and prevent UN relief teams from being shot at while delivering aid to people in need.

Well over 100,000 people have been killed and an estimated 9 million others driven from their homes since the conflict erupted between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and various groups seeking his ouster nearly three years ago.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), there are currently more than 2.4 million refugees registered in the region: some 932,000 in Lebanon; 574,000 in Jordan; some 613,000 in Turkey; 223,000 in Iraq; and about 134,000 in Egypt.

In today's resolution, the Council emphasized that the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution and expressed support for the UN-sponsored direct talks between Government and opposition representatives.

At the end of the second round of talks last week, Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN-Arab League Joint Special Representative, expressed regret that only modest cooperation between the sides was reached on humanitarian effort.

Mr. Brahimi, who is scheduled to be at the UN Headquarters next week, said the parties had agreed that a new round of talks would focus on violence and terrorism, a transitional governing body, national institutions and national reconciliation.

'You are not alone,' Ban tells people of Central African Republic in appeal to end conflict

22 February - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has again taken to the airwaves to deliver a personal appeal to the people of strife-riven Central African Republic (CAR) to lay down their weapons, come together, and end the spiralling bloodshed and inter-communal violence that has plagued the country for months on end.

“You are not alone. Many countries are working for peace,” the Secretary-General says in a video and audio message, informing the war-weary people of the CAR that he has appealed to the international community to do much more: to provide more troops and police to protect people; more aid to save lives.

Mr. Ban delivered a similar message on 13 December and today's broadcast comes on the heels of his briefing to the UN Security Council on Thursday at which he put forward a six-point initiative for addressing the country's most urgent priorities and needs, including more troops and police, increased efforts for the peace process, support for the Government, funding for humanitarian assistance and accountability.

The conflict in CAR erupted when mainly Muslim Séléka rebels launched attacks in December 2012 and has taken on increasingly sectarian overtones as mainly Christian militias known as anti-Balaka (anti-machete) have taken up arms.
Thousands of people are believed to have been killed, and 2.2 million, about half the population, need humanitarian aid. The UN estimates that nearly half a million children are among the almost 1 million driven from their homes.

In his message, which was recorded in French, English and Sango, the national language, the Secretary-General expresses his solidarity with the people and says: “I am also appealing to you, the people of the Central African Republic. End the bloodshed. Stop the killings. Lay down your weapons.”

“Those committing violence are only dividing and destroying your beloved country. Muslims and Christians have built your country together. I know you will do so again,” says Mr. Ban.

“I stand with you – and I pledge my full support for peace and reconciliation – justice and accountability – for all the people of the Central African Republic.”

South Sudan: Malakal, site of recent clashes, ‘tense, deserted,’ UN peacekeepers report

24 February - The South Sudanese city of Malakal is looted and burned, with more than 100 bodies scattered along the route, United Nations peacekeepers in the country reported today.

UNMISS, the UN Mission, conducted multiple patrols over the weekend to the capital of the Upper Nile state where the situation is said to be “tense.”

According to information from a UN spokesperson in New York, the Mission visited various civilian sites in the town, including churches and a hospital.

“At the Malakal Teaching Hospital, the patrol observed approximately 100 patients, most of whom were wounded or sick,” the spokesperson said.

It added that UNMISS extracted 13 patients “requiring urgent medical attention” to its hospital within the Malakal base where it continues to protect some 22,000 civilians. More than 50,000 other people are seeking refuge at UN bases throughout the country after violence flared up in mid-December between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and former deputy president Riek Machar.

A report released Friday by UNMISS outlines some of the human rights abuses committed by both sides since 15 December, including rapes, mass killings and torture, and warned that civilians in the world’s youngest nation continue to be targeted.

The report notes that large numbers of civilians were deliberately targeted and killed along ethnic lines and many more were displaced for similar reasons.
Head of European security bloc outlines areas for greater collaboration with UN

24 February - Security in Europe cannot be taken for granted, as illustrated by the political crisis and recent escalation of violence in Ukraine, the head of the world’s largest regional security grouping said today, as he outlined areas for closer cooperation between the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations.

“These developments have revealed the need to foster dialogue, re-establish trust, and rebuild bridges both within Ukraine and across the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian region,” said Didier Burkhalter, Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE and President of the Swiss Confederation.

In his briefing to the Security Council, Mr. Burkhalter proposed establishing an International Contact Group on Ukraine, which has been witnessing mass protests and deadly clashes for several months, culminating in the removal of its President on Saturday by Parliament.

“We are currently witnessing a phase of de-escalation in Ukraine,” he stated. “It is essential to support a fair and inclusive process of transition which does not marginalize any part of Ukraine or any community. Ukraine deserves full international attention and support.”

Mr. Burkhalter went on to outline several areas for greater collaboration between the OSCE and the UN, noting that such cooperation significantly increases the impact of the good work that is being done on the ground.

“Regional organizations need to play a leading role in implementing on the ground the commitments undertaken in the context of the UN,” he stated.

“This is precisely why we have decided to focus our efforts on better implementation. International instruments for human rights, democracy and the rule of law as well as conventions and political commitments can only help improve people’s lives if their implementation is accepted and promoted by States at national level. Organizations like the UN and the OSCE should do everything possible to support States in these efforts.”

He noted that the OSCE is working in close cooperation with UN bodies on issues such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, the prevention of torture, and the fight against terrorism.

“We are eager to intensify the dialogue between our organizations. My hope is that we will succeed in translating many ideas for further cooperation into successful projects.”

Based in Vienna, Austria, the OSCE comprises 57 States stretching from the United States across Europe and Central Asia to the borders of China.

In a message to the OSCE’s 20th Ministerial Council, held last December in the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon hailed the work done by the regional body and noted the intensive cooperation that already exists between the two organizations, from Central Asia to the South Caucasus and South-eastern Europe.

“The OSCE is a vital partner for the United Nations. I look forward to our continued cooperation, from immediate crises to longer-term issues such as combating climate change, eradicating poverty and shaping an ambitious sustainable development agenda for the post-2015 period,” he stated.
Senior UN officials highlight need for strengthening capabilities of peacekeeping operations

24 February - Innovating and strengthening the capabilities of United Nations peacekeeping operations is essential to ensure safety and security, to adequately protect civilians, and to modernize mission postures in line with the evolving nature of conflict, the top officials from the UN peacekeeping and field support departments told a special review committee today.

“Flexibility and innovation at Headquarters and within our missions is no longer an option, but an acute necessity,” Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations told the opening of the 2014 session of the General Assembly body charged with reviewing all aspects of those operations.

“Taken together, growing demand and high expectations, coupled with constrained resources, must lead to an equally high international responsiveness and commitment.”

Known informally as the “C34”, the Special Committee, established by the Assembly in 1965, works through the Fourth Committee on Special Political and Decolonization, and this year has reports before it on issues ranging from implementation of the global field support strategy, to special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict.

Providing some statistics, Mr. Ladsous said nine peacekeeping operations covering 95 per cent of the Department’s total field personnel currently have mandates to protect civilians, often in extremely challenging conditions and in the face of high expectations. In addition, he said that studies revealed that when peacekeeping missions are deployed in post-conflict situations, countries are 50 per cent less likely to experience an outbreak of conflict again.

He went on to say that the breadth of missions the UN is currently required to conduct and support is more diverse than ever, involving distinct partners, diverse operating environments, and widely varying mandates, each demanding a distinct mix of skills and capabilities.

As such, he set out five factors that, taken as a whole, impact how peacekeeping operations can effectively carry out their mandated tasks: continued high demand for UN peacekeeping; a heightened level of new threats; continuing high resource constraints; the complexity of contemporary threats requires close and enhanced partnerships; and the need for high political engagement and support.

“Peacekeeping remains a vital tool for international peace and security and a flagship of the United Nations,” he said, underscoring that peacekeeping it is a collective effort demanding that the highest standards of conduct are upheld by all UN personnel.

“It rests upon strong cooperation between the Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Secretariat; between the Member States contributing personnel and financial support. The C34 brings together the full range of Member States in support of peacekeeping.”

“Your voice and guidance in policy matters is an important signal of the political commitment and support of the UN for our peacekeepers,” he told Special Committee members.

In her address, Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, Ameera Haq, spotlighted peacekeeping activities over a year that “clearly, has been anything but business as usual.” She said 2013 and the first months of 2014 have been marked by an uninterrupted sequence of new challenges and operational demands. New missions have been set up in complex operating environments and existing operations have undergone profound, historic change.

“A critical driver of our work over the past year has been the growing security risks faced by our colleagues in the field,” she said, emphasizing that the policy implication is that “we must do more on the side of prevention and risk mitigation...
when seeking to protect our colleagues. Providing for the safety and security of deployed personnel in volatile environments is an absolute necessity. And it is a necessity that will almost certainly increase the cost of doing business.”

Continuing, Ms. Haq said the conceptual backdrop for all of efforts of the Department of Field Support (DFS) in improving the timeliness, quality and cost-effectiveness of mission support is the Global Field Support Strategy (GFSS). “As the overall budget of UN peacekeeping for 2013-2014 is nearing the $8 billion mark it is all the more important that we apply the GFSS, and its spirit of responsible stewardship of resources, in all that we do.”

“A top priority for DFS is to achieve continuous improvement in the services we provide to our troops,” she explained adding that another key priority for both DFS and DPKO is to address delays in the provision of critical enablers during mission start-up and reconfiguration.

“Experience makes unequivocally clear that critical assets such as engineering capability, air assets, medical facilities, and signal companies take more time to generate and deploy than ‘boots on the ground.’ We need them both and we need to ensure that they arrive when needed,” said Ms Haq.

Peacekeeping, she said, requires a shared vision backed by strong cooperation between Member States and the Secretariat. “When it has the necessary resources to deliver in the field, when it is empowered by the membership to be flexible, and when it is focused on the achievement of results as the guidepost for its efforts, UN peacekeeping is a powerful resource for conflict management and peace consolidation.”

**Urgent electoral reforms needed ahead of polls in Côte d’Ivoire – UN expert**

**24 February** - Côte d’Ivoire must adopt urgent reforms before the presidential elections scheduled for October, a United Nations independent expert today warned following an official visit to the country.

Doudou Diène, who is charged by the UN Human Rights Council to monitor, report and advise on the situation of human rights in Côte d’Ivoire, urged the authorities there to accelerate the resolution of substantive issues, including the reform of the Independent Electoral Commission and the updating of the electoral list.

The expert, who during a 13-day visit to the country met with officials, civil society and members of the diplomatic corps, also urged officials to speed up “the unbiased reintegration of ex-combatants, and the organisation of trials related to the post-election crisis, as well as reparation for victims of the crisis.”

The West African country was split by civil war in 2002. A 2010 presidential election, meant to be a culminating point in the peace process, resulted in months of violence when Laurent Gbagbo refused to step down after losing to Alassane Ouattara. Mr. Gbagbo finally surrendered the following April.

The human rights expert welcomed the improved security situation, supported by authorities establishing State institutions and re-launching the political dialogue between the Government and the opposition.

“I encourage the different political parties to refrain from divisive comments that could undermine the success of the ongoing political talks,” he said.

The Independent Expert also acknowledged the authorities’ efforts to re-establish the rule of law and reinforce the democratic process that included extending the mandates of the Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Investigation Cell, provisionally releasing detainees linked to the electoral crisis, and urging exiles to return.

Among challenges in the country, Mr. Diène expressed concern at the slow pace of judicial proceedings in following up the recommendations of the National Commission of Inquiry, which had reported that grave human rights violations were
committed by both sides during the crisis.

That recommendation is part of a comprehensive report that Mr. Diène will present to the Geneva-based Council next month. Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.