



In the headlines:

- Security Council holds 'urgent' meeting on situation in Ukraine
- Mediation 'still possible' between communities in Central African Republic – UN official
- Venezuela: UN human rights chief urges halt to violence, inflammatory rhetoric
- UN health agency calls on countries to invest in prevention and care for hearing loss
- Good governance key to ensuring equality, peaceful coexistence, UN expert tells Nigeria
- DR Congo: funding gap forces UN agency to scale back food rations
- Prospects for climate agreement boosted by survey of national laws
- Independent UN expert urges Guinea-Bissau to address critical needs of the poorest
- UN expert urges support for strengthening Mali's justice system

Security Council holds 'urgent' meeting on situation in Ukraine

28 February - The United Nations Security Council held this afternoon what its President described as an "urgent" meeting on the situation in Ukraine, with the body's members noting that it is important for all political actors in the strife-torn country to exercise maximum restraint and pursue inclusive dialogue.

"The Security Council...reviewed with concern the recent developments in Ukraine," said Raimonda Murmokaitė, Permanent Representative of Lithuania which holds the rotating presidency of the 15-nation body for February.



Amb. Raimonda Murmokaitė of Lithuania. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

The Council met in closed-door consultations at the request of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN, which appealed in a letter earlier today to the Council President for an urgent meeting "due to the deterioration of the situation in the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea, Ukraine, which threatens the territorial integrity of Ukraine."

On Saturday, 22 February, Members of the Parliament of Ukraine – which had been witnessing mass protests since last November – voted to remove President Viktor Yanukovich, and an arrest warrant has reportedly been issued for his arrest. The move came after more than 100 people were killed last week in the latest wave of deadly clashes in the capital, Kiev.

Speaking to the press after the consultations, Ambassador Murmokaitė said the Council had been briefed by UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco.

"Support had been expressed for the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. The Council agreed that it was important that all political actors in Ukraine exercise maximum restraint and called for an inclusive dialogue recognizing the diversity of the Ukrainian society," said the Council President.

Amid the rapidly unfolding events in Ukraine, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for an inclusive political process to enable the country to emerge from the 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 issued in New York earlier this week.

In addition, this past Tuesday, the Secretary-general dispatched Robert Serry to Kiev as his Senior Advisor to assure all citizens of Ukraine of the UN’s support and also convey that he expects all key international actors to work collaboratively to help the country during the crisis.

Mr. Serry has held meetings with, among others, the new Speaker of Parliament, the Vice Prime Minister, the acting Minister of Finance, and the acting Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to discuss the situation and concerted efforts to bring about a stable and prosperous future.

Mediation ‘still possible’ between communities in Central African Republic – UN official



Ten-year-old Prophète (left) and his friend Ardi, 7, live on the streets in PK5, one of the last neighborhoods in Bangui, Central African Republic, where Christians and Muslims still live side by side. Photo: UNHCR/A. Greco

28 February - Amid reports of retaliatory killings between armed Christian and Muslim factions the Central African Republic (CAR), a senior United Nations official today warned that “ethno-religious cleansing” is being carried out in the country, and now it is “most important” for mediation among the communities, and for more international forces to be deployed to protect civilians.

“It is still possible for communities to continue to live together, but intensive mediation is necessary for that to happen,” said Philip Leclerc, who is in charge of the protection cluster in CAR for the UN refugee agency (UNHCR).

“What is most important at the moment is that mediation take place in many [areas] across the country,” he said, adding however that if mediation fails, the UN has no other possibility but to evacuate groups to safer places, or secure their safe passage to the north,

Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Chad where some 288,000 people have taken refuge.

Back from a two-month deployment, Mr. Leclerc said that people were trapped and trying to save their lives amid escalating violence in which Muslims, in particular, were being targeted.

The conflict in CAR erupted when 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.

“It is extremely important that international forces be increased so that people [can be] saved,” Mr. Leclerc said at a briefing in Geneva. He noted that the State is increasingly re-exercising its power, and security is also provided as a result of the International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) and the French mission, known as Sangaris.

Noting that the violence in CAR reminded him of that which engulfed Gorazde and Srebrenica in 199r, he said that in an extremely dire situation, “people were relying on United Nations forces, and sometimes on protection jut by the mere presence [of those forces].”

“If there are more international forces, there would certainly be fewer human rights violations and fewer reasons for people to flee,” Mr. Leclerc said.

Also on the CAR today, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) confirmed that it had reunited four abducted children with their

father.

The two girls and two boys were seized and held ransom by the militia, but released following negotiations.

“Child abductions represent a new and disturbing deteriorating in the conflict,” UNICEF spokesperson Patrick McCormick told journalists.

Venezuela: UN human rights chief urges halt to violence, inflammatory rhetoric

28 February - The United Nations human rights chief today condemned the recent violence in Venezuela, and urged the Government to ensure respect for freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

“The inflammatory rhetoric from all sides is utterly unhelpful and risks escalating the tense situation in the country,” High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay stressed. “It is time for all sides to move beyond verbal aggression and towards meaningful dialogue. This crisis will only be resolved if the human rights of all Venezuelans are respected.”



High Commissioner for Human Rights
Navi Pillay. Photo: Violaine Martin

In a news release issued by her office (OHCHR), Ms. Pillay also voiced deep concern at the reported excessive use of force by the authorities in response to protests, including yesterday in the capital, Caracas. She unequivocally condemned the violence leading to death and injuries, irrespective of the perpetrators, and called on all sides to renounce violence.

At least 140 people have been injured and 13 people have died since the beginning of the unrest, according to the General Public Prosecutor. Noting that 11 police and intelligence officers have been arrested in connection with violence during the protests, Ms. Pillay urged an impartial, full and independent investigation into every case of death and injury, and for those responsible to be brought to justice.

OHCHR said that, according to the latest known official figures, 579 people have been arrested since the unrest in the country began earlier this month.

“I am concerned that a very large number of people have been arrested and we have reports indicating that some of them are being held incommunicado. I urge the authorities to ensure that people are not penalised for exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression,” said the High Commissioner.

“Those who are being detained merely for exercising these rights must be promptly released. All cases must be handled according to international standards of due process.”

She added that concrete action by the authorities, including through full and independent investigations, releasing peaceful protestors who have been detained, as well as disarming armed groups, will go a long way towards defusing tensions and paving the way for resolving the crisis.

Earlier this week, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon voiced his sadness at continuing reports of violence and loss of life amid protests in the South American nation, and urged that all efforts be made to lower the tensions and prevent further violence.

“He hopes for concrete gestures by all parties to reduce polarization and create the necessary conditions to engage in a meaningful dialogue so that calm can be fully restored in the country as soon as possible,” Mr. Ban’s spokesperson said in a statement.

UN health agency calls on countries to invest in prevention and care for hearing loss



The World Health Organization (WHO) is calling on Governments to invest in hearing care. Photo: The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)/A. Smith

28 February - The United Nations health agency is calling on Governments to invest in hearing care, as a new survey finds that many countries lack the capacity to prevent and care for hearing loss, which affects 360 million people worldwide.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the highest prevalence of disabling hearing loss is found in the Asia Pacific, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. About half of all cases of hearing loss worldwide are easily prevented or treated.

However, a report published by the agency on the occasion of International Ear Care Day, observed on 3 March, says that just 32 of the 76 countries who responded to a WHO survey have developed plans and programmes to prevent and control ear diseases and hearing loss.

Many countries lack trained health personnel, educational facilities, data and national plans to address the needs of those living with ear and hearing problems. The gap between need and services is greatest in sub-Saharan Africa.

“The results of this survey are a clear call to action for governments and partners to invest in hearing care, especially at community and primary level,” said Etienne Krug, Director of the WHO Department of Violence and Injury Prevention and Disability.

“The programmes must aim to benefit all, including disadvantaged parts of the population who are least able to access hearing services,” added Dr. Krug.

WHO notes that a leading cause for hearing loss in younger ages, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, is untreated ear infections, which often presents with discharge from the ear. Vaccine-preventable infectious diseases such as rubella, meningitis, measles, or mumps can also lead to hearing loss.

Good ear care practices, such as reducing exposure to noise and avoiding insertion of objects into the ears, can prevent many from developing ear and hearing problems. A large percentage of people living with hearing loss can benefit from early identification and appropriate treatment.

“Ear and hearing problems and the use of hearing aids are often associated with myths and misconceptions,” said Shelly Chadha of the WHO unit for the Prevention of Blindness and Deafness.

“National programmes should therefore not only focus on prevention and service provision but also on awareness-raising,” Dr. Chadha noted.

Good governance key to ensuring equality, peaceful coexistence, UN expert tells Nigeria



Rita Izsák, UN Independent Expert on minority issues. Photo: OHCHR

28 February - Good governance is essential for Nigeria – with its rich ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity – to ensure minority rights, equality and peaceful coexistence for all its citizens, an independent United Nations human rights expert stressed today.

“I found evidence that in states where inclusive governance prevails and communities placed trust in their leadership, there are fewer communal fractures and concerns about minority rights,” said Rita Izsák, the Independent Expert on minority issues.

“However, the exclusion of some groups, partisan politics, corruption, and the reality or the perception of bias and favouritism along ethnic or religious lines, fuel distrust, suspicion and anger,” she added in a news release issued at the end of her first official visit to Nigeria.

She urged the Nigerian Government to strengthen measures to fully implement the constitutional guarantees of equality, unity and belonging, in order to protect minority rights.

The expert noted that, for the most part, minority and majority communities coexisted in harmony in Nigeria, which has over 250 ethnic groups and even more languages are spoken. At the same time, she highlighted concerns that threaten unity in several states and require attention.

“In states that I have visited, including Plateau state and Kaduna state, today there are new divisions where once was relatively peaceful coexistence,” she noted. “I have been saddened to learn that violent attacks perpetrated against both Christian and Muslim communities have heightened suspicions and in some locations created a climate of fear.

“I have been deeply moved by meeting victims of violence from different communities,” Ms. Izsák said. “Those who incite or perpetrate violence, including extremist elements, must be held to account for their crimes and must not be allowed to succeed in creating divisions between communities.”

The expert urged the authorities to enhance the capacity, training and resources of the security forces in regions where violence has broken out, but stressed that sustainable solutions to communal violence require more than a heightened security response alone.

“Some of the tensions and conflicts that have erupted in Nigeria’s northern and ‘Middle-Belt’ states have been framed as religious or ethnic conflicts,” she noted.

“However, it is clear to me that, while they have evolved to have obvious religious and ethnic dimensions, this is far too simplistic an understanding and their root causes lie in other factors – competition for resources or unequal allocation of resources, land issues, population movement and migration, and even the gradual but important impact of climate change,” she stated.

The expert welcomed local and grassroots initiatives to build bridges of understanding and trust between communities, through inter-faith and inter-communal dialogue, shared activities and education. She was particularly impressed by creative women and youth initiatives that address underlying root causes of potential conflicts and help to prevent them.

Ms. Izsák visited the Niger Delta, where she met Ogoni and Ikwerre communities who highlighted their efforts to overcome what they describe as abandonment and marginalization and the devastating effects of frequent oil spills.

She also sought information on Nigeria’s linguistic diversity and urged the Government to consider formal and informal measures to protect and promote the country’s rich linguistic heritage.



Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights 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.

DR Congo: funding gap forces UN agency to scale back food rations



People lining up for food distribution in the Lac Vert IDP site near Goma, North Kivu, DRC. Photo: OCHA/Imane Gana Cherif

28 February - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced today that a major funding gap is forcing the agency to scale back geographical coverage of its work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and to instead focus on what it describes as “acutely-insecure, conflict-affected areas” in the vast country.

Speaking to the press in Geneva, WFP spokesperson Elisabeth Byrs warned that the agency’s work in the DRC is being hindered by “severe funding constraints” and as a result it will begin to cut rations to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country’s eastern North Kivu province, and to scale back some other operations.

She said WFP had announced last year that it was aiming to reach 4.2 million food-insecure people across the DRC between July 2013 and December 2015, but the shortage of funds had already caused reductions in rations and a scaling back of some operations during recent months.

In December 2013, WFP assisted 1.5 million food-insecure people in the DRC, including IDPs, refugees, children and women.

Yet the agency estimates that some 11 per cent of the rural population in the DRC is food-insecure. As such, Ms. Byrs said, WFP needs 15,000 tons of food for the next six months, but will be unable to provide that food without the actual funding.

WFP urgently requires \$48.5 million for its operations to assist hundreds of thousands of conflict-affected and food-insecure people through August, she said, adding that so far, the agency has only received \$8 million – about 4 per cent – of what it required.

She stressed that the situation in Katanga province was deteriorating and underlined that WFP was “extremely preoccupied” by the arrival of refugees from strife-torn Central African Republic (CAR). The agency was also very concerned about chronic malnutrition, which affects more than 43 per cent of the children in the DRC.

Prospects for climate agreement boosted by survey of national laws



UN officials and legislators attend the GLOBE Climate Legislation Summit in Washington DC. Photo: UNEP

28 February - Sixty-six countries have legislation governing climate mitigation and adaptation plans, revealed a newly released United Nations-supported study that aims to boost progress towards a new universal agreement on climate change.

Results of the study, co-authored by the UN and World Bank-supported Global Legislators Organisation (GLOBE) and the Grantham Research Institute at the London School of Economics (LSE), were disclosed yesterday to legislators and senior UN officials in Washington DC.

The new study covers countries responsible for 88 per cent of global carbon emissions. It shows that of those 66 countries, 64 “have progressed or are progressing” on climate change, according to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

“It is no exaggeration to say that the clean revolution we need is being carried forward by legislation,” said UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres. “Domestic legislation is critical because it is the linchpin between action on the

ground and the international agreement.”

The meeting comes 18 months ahead global legal climate accord to be signed in Paris. To build momentum and mobilize political will for those talks, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will convene a climate change summit this September at UN Headquarters in New York. That meeting will be an opportunity for global leaders from Government, business, finance, and civil society to initiate ambitious joint actions on the ground to reduce emissions and strengthen climate resilience.

At the meeting, held earlier this week, in addition to reviewing the study, participants also discussed how national laws will be recognized within a 2015 international climate change agreement.

“At the national level, it is clear that when countries enact clean energy policies, investment follows. At the international level, it is equally clear that domestic legislation opens the political space for international agreements and facilitates overall ambition,” Ms. Figueres noted.

In addition to Ms. Figueres, the UN was also represented by the head of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Achim Steiner and the UN Assistant Secretary-General, Robert Orr.

Among the 66 countries covered in the study, two began processes to reverse legislation. In Australia, the new Government proposed to repeal aspects of the Clean Energy Act, while Japan announced a lowering of its ambition on climate change in response to its reduced reliance on nuclear energy following the Fukushima accident.

Independent UN expert urges Guinea-Bissau to address critical needs of the poorest

28 February - An independent United Nations human rights expert today called on authorities in Guinea-Bissau to address the critical needs of the poorest and most marginalized members of society as she wrapped up her first official visit to the West African nation.

“The people of Guinea-Bissau cannot wait any longer for state policies to become effective,” said Magdalena Sepúlveda, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, adding that authorities must act with the vision to ensure a better life for current and future generations.

“Guinea-Bissau has an opportunity to progress, but it must agree on a common vision which moves the country’s politics away from short-term power struggles and towards working for the well-being of all members of society, especially those living in abject poverty,” she stressed in a news release issued in the capital, Bissau.

With a population of 1.5 million inhabitants, Guinea-Bissau is among the poorest countries in the world. In 2012, it ranked 176th of out 187 countries on the UN Human Development Index. In addition, efforts are underway to restore constitutional order in the country, which is recovering from an April 2012 coup, including presidential elections scheduled for next month.

Ms. Sepúlveda noted that steps adopted to improve the country’s legal framework have had limited success in improving the situation of the poorest. “Development depends on giving priority to investment in social services such as health and education and the strengthening of the agricultural sector to ensure food security,” she stressed.

The expert was struck by the extent to which the social and financial well-being of the community and households rely entirely on women. “Women and girls are Guinea-Bissau’s foundational pillar, yet their reward is a neglect of their rights and needs,” she said.

Despite their “tireless efforts” to secure the well-being of their families and communities, women and girls have limited access to education, health and justice and are victims of sexual violence, exploitation, forced marriage and adolescent pregnancies.



A nurse gives a measles vaccination to a child in Guinea-Bissau. Photo: UNICEF/Roger Lemoyne

Compared with men, women suffer from less access to health services, higher incidence of HIV/AIDS, lower levels of school enrolment, lower literacy rates, reduced incomes, higher rates of unemployment and greater difficulties in overcoming poverty.

“The incidence of women living with HIV/AIDS and rates for maternal mortality in Guinea-Bissau are among the worst in the world,” she stated.

Ms. Sepúlveda called for systematic structural changes to tackle impunity, ensure access to justice, address education and agricultural reforms, and address gender inequality. She also provided specific recommendations in the areas of health, education, employment, social protection, and access to land, and gender equality.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights 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.

Ms. Sepúlveda will present a full report on Guinea-Bissau to the Council this June.

UN expert urges support for strengthening Mali’s justice system

28 February - Calling on the United Nations and the wider international community to help the Government of Mali strengthen its judicial system, the UN independent expert on human rights in the country expressed concern today at the difficulties facing Malian justice in the prosecution of serious crimes committed in during the violence that engulfed the north in 2012.

Wrapping up a recent visit to Mali, Suliman Baldo said that despite the authorities’ laudable efforts in the fight against impunity for the crimes alleged against former military junta in the south, the justice system faced enormous difficulties in prosecuting alleged perpetrators of serious crimes committed by armed groups during the occupation of the north and abuses committed by some elements of the national forces during efforts to liberate that part of the territory.

The Government is seeking to restore stability and rebuild following a series of setbacks since early 2012, including a military coup d’état, renewed fighting between Government forces and Tuareg rebels, and the seizure of its northern territory by radical Islamists.

The UN Security Council last April authorized the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to assist the authorities in their efforts, with support from the French security mission in Mali, known as Serval.

Having visited the country from 17 to 26 February, Mr. Baldo explained in a press release from the UN human rights office (OHCHR) that the distance between the courts in charge of the files on the north, based in the capital, Bamako, and victims and the places where the crimes were committed “is a major obstacle to the Malian justice.”

“Many crimes remain unpunished therefore,” he said, adding that members of armed groups or suspected collaborators arrested in the north of the country are being held for long periods beyond the statutory period without trial, because of the lack of resources for the organization of investigations into the incidents that took place in the north.

Mr. Baldo encouraged the Malian authorities to formulate a strategy to expedite investigations in the north by setting up a special investigation unit and mobile counseling centers for witnesses and victims.

“It is up to the Government to develop a vision to cope with the failure of Malian justice and mobilize technical partners for logistics, security and financial support,” he said, adding that it is also vital that judges and police officers be deployed in places where the crimes were committed.



Chadian UN peacekeepers patrol a MINUSMA check point in Tessalit, North of Mali. Photo MINUSMA/Marco Dormino

The expert called MINUSMA and the international community to assist the Government in supporting judges and their teams so that they can effectively conduct investigations on the ground, providing them with the materials, logistics and substantial resources and the protection necessary to visit the sites and locations where products are possible violations.

During his ten-day visit , Mr. Baldo met with senior Government representatives , including the Minister of Justice , Minister of national reconciliation and development of the northern regions , the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation international , the Minister of Labour and Social and humanitarian Affairs, and the Minister of National Education.

The independent expert also met with the Attorney General, the General Staff of the armies of Mali, the President of the National Commission on Human Rights, representatives of civil society, religious leaders, the diplomatic corps and agencies of the United Nations.

He also visited detention centers in Bamako and visited Gao in the north, and Mauritania to meet victims' associations and north of Malian refugees.

The Independent Expert will present a report on the situation of human rights in Mali 26 March 2014 the UN Human Rights Council.