In Shanghai, Ban urges China’s continued support for sustainable development

19 May - The partnership between the United Nations and China was in the spotlight today in Shanghai where just-arrived Secretary General Ban Ki-moon met with President Xi Jinping and Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi before outlining key global challenges at the city’s premiere institute for the study of international politics, economy and security strategy.

“This is a time of enormous challenge,” Mr. Ban told an audience at the Shanghai Institute of International Studies (SIIS). “I look to China to provide global leadership, and I look to all of you to provide ideas and encouragement.”

The UN chief, who arrived in China Sunday, highlighted in his speech the conflicts in Syria, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Ukraine, as well as the maritime tensions in Asia.

“We must never forget that all tensions are best resolved through dialogue and in accordance with the principles enshrined in the UN Charter,” he urged.

He noted some long-term risks and trends, among them growing inequality, the rise of intolerance and prevalent injustice which all contribute to the aggravating insecurity.

“The impacts of climate change are being felt already and will affect generations to come,” he said, noting that key resources are in progressively shorter supply.
To overcome these and other challenges, the UN “must rise to the moment”, he said stressing that a series of efforts will be crucial over the next 18 months, the deadline to reach the anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

“One of the goals was to cut poverty and hunger by half by the year 2015,” he said. “Thanks in large measure to China; the world has met that ambition years in advance.”

The international community is now shaping a post-2015 development agenda which “will allow us to focus on sustainable development as a model for the global economy,” said the top UN official.

China’s role in sustainable development was also discussed today during a bilateral meeting between Mr. Ban and President Xi. A UN spokesperson said Mr. Ban also expressed gratitude for China’s “strong support and contribution” to the UN’s work to promote peace and security, and human rights.

Among the specific issues covered, the two leaders discussed issues related to the Korean Peninsula, and the situation in Myanmar.

In an earlier meeting, Mr. Ban and Foreign Minister Yi agreed that there was a need to work together on issues related to human rights and the “Every Woman, Every Child” initiative to improve the health of women and children around the world, as well as climate change.

“We all know what scientists and the public are telling us. It is in all our interest to address climate change now!” he stressed in his remarks to SIIS.

China is “on the frontlines of the fight,” Mr. Ban added, with new carbon markets, large investments in renewable energy and strong new laws on pollution.

Senior Chinese representatives are due to participate in a climate summit at the UN Headquarters in New York in September where Mr. Ban said he is “calling on all leaders to be on the right side of history.”

Tomorrow, Mr. Ban will participate in the opening ceremony of the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

The two-day conference, which will be attended by many of the regional leaders, is themed around increasing dialogue, mutual trust and collaboration to build a new Asia. Unconventional security issues are also expected to be on the agenda, according to media reports.

Mr. Ban is also due to visit the capital city of Beijing during his stay in China.

The SIIS, the venue for today’s speech, was chosen in part due to its partnership with the UN Development Programme (UNDP). SIIS is an academic partner of UNDP for the Second Global Governance Forum to be held this October.
Syria: Palestinian students allowed to temporarily leave Yarmouk camp for school exams

19 May - Amid a “dire” situation in the Yarmouk refugee camp where thousands of civilians have been and hiding from snipers and often eating weeds to survive, the United Nations agency that administers aid to Palestinian refugees across the Middle East has confirmed that 120 students were allowed to do what anywhere else would generate few headlines – take school exams.

Images from the camp show teenage girls and boys carrying bags, heading towards separate white UN buses. Once they re-emerge on the other side of Yarmouk, many are embraced by relatives who have not seen them for months.

The ninth-graders are sitting for the final exams which are carried out at the same time nationally. The two-week test will determine if they go on to secondary schools, which could lead them to become a doctor or lawyer, or to a technical school where they could learn to work in agriculture or an industry such as computer science.

The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) coordinated for weeks with the Syrian Government to allow the children to temporarily leave the camp. Each is accommodated at UNRWA’s Palestine School and at a facility run by the General Administration for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR).

The UN agency “has already provided each student with basic amenities, including hygiene kits, and a small cash stipend,” said spokesperson Chris Gunness.

However, it is not clear what opportunities will be available to the students after they finish the exams.

Over half of the schools run by UNRWA in Syria closed in 2013, affecting some 45,000 children. At the time, the UN agency said of its 118 schools in Syria, only 49 would open for the 2013-2014 school year.

The UN and its humanitarian partners appealed for $1 billion in January to save these refugees and millions of other children from becoming a “lost generation” in Syria, doomed by the civil war in their country to a life of despair, diminished opportunities and broken futures.

Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, who visited Syria in 2013, said after that without a political solution, those children would continue to bear the brunt of the conflict, leaving a generation of angry, illiterate adults.

After the exams, they will return to Yarmouk where 18,000 civilians remain trapped, according to UNRWA figures, and where, since 13 May, when Government military personnel were shot within the food distribution area, no food parcels have been allowed to get through.

The people still living there are getting only a quarter of the minimum food needed to survive since January.

“We are urgently seeking permission from the authorities to resume its food distribution operations in Yarmouk as soon as possible,” Mr. Gunness said.

“We maintain our urgent appeals for continuous, substantial and safe humanitarian access to Yarmouk.”
Calling for end to violent turmoil in Libya, UN urges peaceful settlement of differences

19 May - The United Nations mission in Libya today voiced deep concern over the recent violence in the country, and called on all sides to address differences through political means and on authorities to quickly address the lawlessness.

According to media reports, fierce fighting swept across the capital, Tripoli, on Sunday, after armed men stormed the country’s interim parliament. The violence is reported to be some of the worst since the 2011 uprising that ousted former leader Muammar al-Qadhafi.

In a news release, the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) expressed its deep concern over “the various acts of violence, including the assaults on official institutions and the terrorizing of civilians.”

It also condemned the grave security deterioration in the eastern region resulting in the high number of civilian casualties.

“The Mission calls on the authorities to immediately and quickly address the lawlessness, including the series of assassinations targeting the army, police and judiciary personnel, and to develop and implement a comprehensive security plan with the participation of political, security and social actors,” it stated.

“In this critical period, UNSMIL calls on all sides to immediately cease all military action and related mobilization, and to address differences by political means without violence and threats to the security of the country and the citizens.”

While undergoing its democratic transition, Libya has also been grappling with a deteriorating security situation. The first three months of this year witnessed a dramatic increase in violence across the country, according to the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of UNSMIL, Tarek Mitri, including targeted assassinations, bombings, abductions and attacks on state institutions and civilians.

UN humanitarian chief rallies support for flood-hit Balkan regions

19 May - Deeply concerned by the devastating floods in the Balkans – days of rainfall have reportedly submerged entire villages and triggered landslides across the region – the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator is rallying the international community to provide speedy assistance that can help save lives and put people on the road to recovery.

In a statement issued earlier today, Valerie Amos, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, expressed concern about the flooding that has struck Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

She has since dispatched a team of UN disaster assessment experts to the region, as the Organization's broader humanitarian response has swung in action.

The floods have so far claimed more than 35 lives and affected hundreds of thousands of people, she said. Reportedly the worst floods in the Balkans in decades, emergency responders fear that more rain could lead to further rises in water levels, additional storm surges and landslides.

Media reports suggest that Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been affected by cyclone Tamara and have been experiencing extremely heavy rain, strong winds and low temperatures. On 13 May, continuous, heavy rainfall began, and the wider region, including Croatia, has recorded three months’ worth of rain in three days.
“In all three countries, the Government is leading the flood response, distributing food and other relief supplies, and providing emergency shelter. A state of emergency has been declared in Serbia and Bosnia, where tens of thousands of people have been evacuated,” said Ms. Amos in her statement.

Reporting that the UN and humanitarian partners have offered assistance to the authorities in the affected countries, Ms. Amos said that she has dispatched a UN Disaster Coordination and Assessment team to Serbia and life-saving supplies are on their way from Brindisi, where the Organization maintains a logistics base.

In addition, teams from the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are working with the authorities to help assess people's needs and provide food, clean water and sanitation support and debris removal.

“I welcome the speedy response by the national authorities and their partners and the support provided by neighbouring countries and other members of the international community, Mr. Amos said, adding: “We must do all we can to ensure that further loss of life is prevented and help people recover.”

Later in the day, WFP announced that it had sent a second batch of emergency relief items to Serbia. The shipment included water tanks, generators and inflatable boats provided by WFP and the Norwegian Government.

A further flight is scheduled today to Tuzla, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with tents and water containers and purification equipment also from the Norwegian Government.

WFP says that it will launch a $1.5 million operation to respond to immediate humanitarian needs upon a request from the Government of Serbia and in coordination with the authorities there and other UN organizations on the ground.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, where floods have exceeded emergency levels in the north, WFP is planning to send life-saving food assistance to 150,000 of the most vulnerable flood-affected people.

**UN launches partnerships, tools to tether economic investment to disaster risk planning**

19 May - Launching an initiative to mainstream disaster risk management into business investment, the United Nations today showcased a digital globe that viscerally lays out current and possible future effects of climate change and other threats, to help stem rampant economic loss from geographic events.

The initiative, called R!SE, “provides a new formula for averting economic losses from disasters, which are a major brake on economic growth and development,” UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said at the launch, organized in New York by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR).

“Because R!SE brings together businesses, investors, insurers, public bodies and educators, it can be the catalyst we need to bring lasting change to how we approach risk,” Mr. Eliasson added, ahead of a demonstration of the Tangible Earth digital globe, that, among other functions, has been used to engage the private sector to play its part in reducing disaster risk.

A response to ten years of record-breaking economic losses and disruption from disasters, which Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called “out of control,” the R!SE partnership will develop and promote global standards on risk metrics and voluntary industry standards for disaster risk-sensitive investment, UNISDR said in a press release.

Margareta Wahlström, head of UNISDR, explained that “disaster risk is not natural but is produced by investment decisions and the range of factors that influence those decisions.” In other words, she added, “There are consequences for ignoring the principles of good land-use and building regulations in any business.”
So far, the partnership includes PricewaterhouseCoopers, The Economist Intelligence Unit, Florida International University, Principles for Responsible Investment, the design and construction firm AECOM and global insurance broker Willis, according to UNISDR.

A minimum of 1,000 asset owners and investment managers, 200 insurers and re-insurers and 100 global businesses in at least 50 cities and 20 countries are targeted for engagement by the R!SE initiative by 2020.

Demonstrating the Tangible Earth globe at the R!SE launch, its inventor Professor Shinichi Takemura showed how the globe portrays the planetary effects of climate variations, earthquake, air pollution and settlement patterns.

Built with the participation of UNISDR to a 1:15 million ratio, compared to the actual earth, the globe can show the real time reverberations of seismic events around the world, or project the population centres flooded by a few metres’ rise in sea level.

It spins at the flick of a finger on its surface, like a schoolroom globe, but is many times more powerful, zooming in on specific areas and graphically revealing innumerable trends and data-sets.

“I am very sorry that children in 21st century are still learning geography, geology and global warming using two-dimensional maps invented in 16th century,” Mr. Takemura told the UN News Centre. “We really need a global medium that will represent what is really going on our planet - that is why we created this thing.”

He added: “We are the first generation who came to understand exceptional beauty, dynamism and rareness of our planet in the context of the universe. We need to convey this message.”

Challenges facing indigenous peoples of Asia spotlighted as UN Forum continues 2014 session

19 May - Non-recognition and marginalization of indigenous populations of Asia, home to two-thirds of the world’s 370 million indigenous peoples, and a growing concern of rising violence against indigenous women and girls surfaced at the mid-way point of the annual UN gathering of indigenous peoples around the world.

“Violence against indigenous women came out very, very strongly” during the half day dialogue Thursday, 14 May, on the Asian region of the 13th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at UN Headquarters, Forum member Raja Devashish Roy of Bangladesh told reporters at a press conference after the morning session.

According to the Permanent Forum, indigenous women continue to pay the price of structural forms of violence and discrimination, as well as from the persistence of conflicts and militarized areas in a number of Asian countries.

“Numerous cases of rape, sexual enslavement and also killing of indigenous women and girls in conflicts have been reported in a number of countries; very few have been investigated and the perpetrators prosecuted,” the Forum said quoting information compiled by UN agencies.

The Permanent Forum, comprised of 16 independent experts, is one of three UN bodies that is mandated to deal specifically with indigenous peoples' issues. The others are the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Special Rapporteur Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Some 1,500 indigenous participants from all regions of the world have come together for this year’s two-week meeting from 12 to 23 May at UN Headquarters where they are engaging with members of the Permanent Forum, UN Member States, and UN agencies in advancing the rights of indigenous peoples.

Opening the session on indigenous peoples in Asia, home to more than 2,000 civilizations and languages, forum member
Joan Carling of the Philippines noted positive developments addressing concerns of indigenous peoples in Indonesia, Nepal and Japan, as well as by UN agencies.

But Ms. Carling, in her overview of the Asian region, cited examples of the extent of marginalization of indigenous peoples in the Asian region. She noted that in the Philippines in the aftermath of the super typhoon Yolanda, which left some 4 million people homeless, among those victims are indigenous peoples who were marginalized in the delivery of aid and remain left out of rehabilitation efforts.

She noted that the Yolanda case demonstrates the vulnerability of indigenous peoples in disasters, saying that Philippines situation mirrors indigenous people victims of tsunamis in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

Ms. Carling also referred to how Asian indigenous peoples “are sacrificed in the name of development,” often experiencing displacement and relocation from their traditional territories, and dispossession of their lands and resources by projects like dam building. The building of 200 dams across Asia is likely to displace indigenous peoples and impact their livelihood, she said.

According to Dalee Sambo Dorough, Chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, “Indigenous peoples in Asia are among the most discriminated against and are economically, socially and politically marginalized.”

“It is time that the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples is effectively implemented in order to address the negative impacts of militarization and economic liberalization on the territories of indigenous peoples, in Asia and across the globe,” said Dr. Dorough.

The Indigenous Peoples of Asia include groups that are often referred to as tribal peoples, hill tribes, scheduled tribes, janajati, orang asli, masyarakat adat, adivasis, ethnic minorities or nationalities.

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was established by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2000. It provides expert advice and recommendations on indigenous issues to the UN System through ECOSOC; raises awareness and promotes the integration and coordination of relevant activities within the UN System; and disseminates information on indigenous issues.

Ban ‘deeply saddened’ at collapse of DPR Korean building

19 May - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today expressed deep sorrow at the loss of lives and injuries caused by the recent tragic collapse of a building in Pyongyang, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Mr. Ban’s spokesperson said the top UN official’s thoughts and prayers are with the victims, their families, and the people of the DPRK.

He expressed the UN’s solidarity with the Government and offered assistance.

According to media reports, a 23-story apartment building that is believed to have housed at least 90 families collapsed last week in the capital story.
Iraq: Ban welcomes initial parliamentary election results

19 May - Welcoming the announcement of the initial results of Iraq’s Council of Representatives election, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today looked forward to the final tally and subsequent timely formation of a new government.

“The Secretary-General welcomes the announcement of the preliminary results of the Council of Representatives election in Iraq of 30 April 2014,” says a statement issued by the UN chief’s spokesperson on the results, which were released in Iraq earlier today.

“He looks forward to the certification of the final results after all procedures have been completed, including the adjudication of possible appeals,” it said, adding that Mr. Ban urges all political parties to engage constructively and in a timely manner in the process of government formation.

The statement goes on to note the Secretary-General’s concern about the security situation in Anbar province. In that regard, Mr. Ban urges the Iraqi Government to ensure that military operations against terrorism are conducted in accordance with the country’s international and constitutional human rights obligations.

“The Secretary-General condemns the deliberate flooding of the Abu Ghraib area and urges all sides to refrain from actions that result in displacement of populations or cause environmental disasters,” the statement says, reiterating Mr. Ban’s appeal regarding the need to address the humanitarian needs of the hundreds of thousands of people affected by the ongoing fighting in Anbar Province.

Just last week, Nickolay Mladenov, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), expressed his concern about reports of increased armed activities in Fallujah, in Anbar province, and its impact on civilians.

“The people of Anbar have suffered from terrorism and violence for too long. All efforts must be made to ensure that fighting ends, people return to their homes, and reconstruction can begin,” he said, adding: “It is vital that those affected by the fighting are able to receive humanitarian support.”

Fighting in Anbar in recent months between Iraqi troops and al-Qaeda-affiliated fighters has displaced hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom are residing in schools, mosques and other public buildings and are in need of various humanitarian items.

Quality care at birth could save nearly 3 million children – UN-backed study

19 May - The majority of the almost 3 million children who die before they turn one month old could be saved if they received quality care around the time of birth, according to the findings released today in a study supported by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which is urging additional attention and resources for this group of children.

“Focusing on the crucial period between labour and the first hours of life can exponentially increase the chances of survival for both mother and child,” said Mickey Chopra, head of UNICEF’s global health programmes.

While there has been “tremendous progress” in saving children under five, he said the world has stumbled in its progress to save the “very youngest, most vulnerable children.”

In its “Every Newborn Series” released today, The Lancet identified the most effective interventions in saving newborns including breastfeeding and new-born resuscitation. The series, co-authored by experts from UNICEF, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the Agha Khan University in Pakistan, among others, also commend ‘kangaroo care’
for premature babies, which consists of prolonged skin-to-skin contact with the mother.

According to UNICEF, 2.9 million babies die each year within their first 28 days. An additional 2.6 million babies are still-born, and 1.2 million of those deaths occur when the baby’s heart stops during labour.

“The first 24 hours after birth are the most dangerous for both child and mother – almost half of maternal and new-born deaths occur then,” the UN agency has reported.

Countries that have made the most progress in saving newborn lives have paid specific attention to this group as part of the overall care extended to mothers and under-fives. For example, Rwanda halved the number of new-born deaths since 2000.

The highest numbers of newborn deaths per year are in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, with 779,000 in India, 267,000 in Nigeria and 202,400 in Pakistan.

Among these countries, every $1 invested in a mother’s or baby’s health gives a nine-fold return on investment in social and economic benefit, according to UNICEF.

A survey of 51 countries with the highest burden of new-born deaths found that if the quality of care received by the richest were to become universal, there would be 600,000 fewer deaths per year – an almost 20 per cent reduction.

**UN expert urges global regulatory regime to battle artery-clogging junk foods**

19 May - Calling today for a new global agreement to regulate unhealthy diets, the United Nations expert on the right to food urged swift action from governments to help change the way the world eats, as obesity-related health problems now kill more people than tobacco.

“Unhealthy diets are now a greater threat to global health than tobacco,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, in a press release.

“Just as the world came together to regulate the risks of tobacco, a bold framework convention on adequate diets must now be agreed,” he said in comments released ahead of today’s opening of the UN World Health Assembly, and on the eve of the 21 May event in Geneva organized by Consumers International to launch their new recommendations: *Towards a Global Convention to Protect and Promote Healthy Diets*.

Mr. De Schutter recalled that, despite increasingly worrying signs and well-identified priority actions, the international community continues to pay insufficient attention to the worsening epidemic of obesity and unhealthy diets.

Two years after his report on nutrition and the right to food, and a decade after the World Health Organization (WHO) launched its *Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health*, he said, obesity continues to advance – and diabetes, heart disease and other health complications along with it.

“The warning signs are not being heard,” he said.

In his 2012 report to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, Mr. De Schutter identified five priority actions to address obesity and unhealthy diets: taxing unhealthy products; regulating foods high in saturated fats, salt and sugar; cracking down on junk food advertising; overhauling misguided agricultural subsidies that make certain ingredients cheaper than others; and supporting local food production so consumers have access to healthy, fresh and nutritious foods.

“Attempts to promote healthy diets will only work if the food systems underpinning them are put right,” he added. “Governments have been focusing on increasing calorie availability, but they have often been indifferent to what kind of calories are on offer, at what price, to whom they are made available, and how they are marketed,” said Mr. De Schutter.
The UN expert also drew attention to the role of breast-milk in infant nutrition, welcoming the recent moves towards regulating the advertising of milk formula in Hong Kong, the Philippines and other places.

“Governments should move forward with these measures, which are essential to ensure that people are protected from aggressive misinformation campaigns,” he said. “They are also crucial to implement the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly recommendations,” he added.

**Future global development agenda must include targets for improved health – UN official**

**19 May** - Health must be a part of any future global development agenda, a senior United Nations official underscored today as she outlined a host of issues afflicting millions around the world and which impact on efforts to reduce poverty and advance overall well-being.

“Better health is a good way to track the world’s true progress in poverty elimination, inclusive growth and equity,” Director-General Margaret Chan said as the World Health Organization (WHO) opened its annual assembly in Geneva.

According to a WHO report released last week, substantial progress has been made on many health-related goals ahead of the 2015 target date for achieving the anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

These include halving the proportion of people without access to improved sources of drinking water, as well as progress in reducing child mortality, improving nutrition and combating HIV.

“For the post-2015 agenda, I see many signs of a desire to aim even higher, with ambitious yet feasible goals. Many more end-games are already on the table,” Dr. Chan said, noting the need to end preventable maternal, neonatal and childhood deaths, eliminate a large number of the neglected tropical diseases, and halt the tuberculosis epidemic.

“We have at our disposal a host of strategies for pursuing ever higher goals,” she added, while also noting that health benefits from WHO’s ability to tap the world’s best expertise.

Outlining the main health challenges facing the world today, the Director-General cited the renewed spread of the polio virus, which is due to several factors including civil unrest, poor immunization coverage and the targeted killing of health workers.

“Two years ago, polio was on its knees, thanks to committed political leadership, better strategies and tools, and the dedication of millions of polio workers,” she stated.

“The factors responsible for this setback are largely beyond the control of the health sector. They are only some of several dangers for health in a world shaped by some universal and ominous trends.”

Among other issues, Dr. Chan highlighted the effects of air pollution, which is the world’s largest single environmental health risk; the growing prevalence of obesity, especially among children, and diet-related non-communicable diseases; and the global cancer crisis, in which the number of new cases has reached an all-time high and is projected to rise.

“Parts of the world are quite literally eating themselves to death. Other parts starve. Hunger and under-nutrition remain an extremely stubborn problem… At the other extreme, we see no good evidence that the prevalence of obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases is receding anywhere. Highly processed foods and beverages loaded with sugar are ubiquitous, convenient and cheap. Childhood obesity is a growing problem with especially high costs.”

The 2014 World Cancer Report, issued by WHO, provoked considerable alarm, noting among other things that developing countries now account for some 70 per cent of all cancer deaths. Many of these people die without treatment, not even pain relief.
“No country anywhere, no matter how rich, can treat its way out of the cancer crisis. A much greater commitment to prevent is needed,” Dr. Chan emphasized. “The same is true for heart disease, diabetes and chronic lung diseases. In some middle-income countries, diabetes treatment alone is now absorbing nearly half of the entire health budget.”

“All of these trends,” she stated, “are certain to increase the world’s inequalities even more. They define the tremendous job that lies ahead for public health. They also shape expectations for the performance of WHO, and the support countries, and the international community, will need from this organization.”

**Fish more important than ever in providing jobs, feeding the world – UN report**

19 May - A new United Nations report highlights the growing role of fish and aquaculture in feeding the world and providing a source of income, and calls for the sustainable and responsible management of the so-called ‘blue world.’

Global fisheries and aquaculture production totalled 158 million tonnes in 2012 – around 10 million tonnes more than 2010 – according to the latest edition of “The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture,” produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The report highlights the great potential of fish farming in responding to the growing demand for food as a result of global population growth. In addition, the planet’s oceans – if sustainably managed – are crucial to providing jobs and feeding the world.

“The health of our planet as well as our own health and future food security all hinge on how we treat the blue world,” FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva said in a news release.

“We need to ensure that environmental well-being is compatible with human well-being in order to make long-term sustainable prosperity a reality for all,” he noted, adding that FAO is committed to promoting ‘Blue Growth,’ which is based on the sustainable and responsible management of aquatic resources.

FAO notes that the renewed focus on the so-called ‘blue world’ comes as the share of fisheries production used for food has grown from about 70 per cent in the 1980s to a record high of more than 85 per cent (136 million tonnes) in 2012. At the same time, per capita fish consumption has soared from 10 kilogrammes in the 1960s to more than 19 kilogrammes in 2012.

The new report also says fish now accounts for almost 17 per cent of the global population’s intake of protein – in some coastal and island countries it can top 70 per cent.

FAO estimates that fisheries and aquaculture support the livelihoods of 10 to 12 per cent of the world’s population. Since 1990 employment in the sector has grown at a faster rate than the world’s population and in 2012 provided jobs for some 60 million people. Of these, 84 per cent were employed in Asia, followed by Africa with about 10 per cent.

Among other findings in the report are that just over 70 per cent of wild fish stocks are being fished within biologically sustainable levels; fish remains among the most traded food commodities worldwide, worth almost $130 billion in 2012; and an estimated 1.3 billion tonnes of food are lost per year – to about one-third of all food produced.
UNICEF demands action to save children of South Sudan from 'living nightmare'

18 May - With malnutrition and conflict stalking the youngest and most vulnerable citizens of South Sudan, the United Nations warned today that hundreds of thousands of children in the country's most crisis-torn areas are at imminent risk of death and disease, including the threat of cholera.

"The dream of a safe and peaceful South Sudan is becoming a living nightmare for its children," said Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Agency (UNICEF) said in a press release ahead of the UN-backed Oslo Humanitarian Pledging Conference, set to convene in the Norwegian capital on Tuesday.

Five months into the conflict, around 80 per cent of children under of the age of five in the three most conflict-affected states – Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity – are at heightened risk of disease and death.

Despite 80,000 people having been fully vaccinated against cholera, the South Sudanese Ministry of Health has confirmed a cholera outbreak in Juba. The cholera caseload is doubling every day, providing troubling proof that the deadly disease is spreading.

UNICEF has helped set up a cholera treatment centre, is supplying tents for triage and patient care, hygiene equipment, clean water and oral rehydration solutions. Over the past 24 hours, hundreds of people have been trained to inform and mobilize communities.

"Right now, the children of South Sudan need humanitarian assistance; they need their leaders to protect their lives, their rights, and their futures; and they need the world to listen – and demand action on their behalf," she added.

The world's youngest nation has been enmeshed in a crisis which began in mid-December 2013 as a political dispute between President Kiir and his former deputy president, Mr. Machar, who had been forced from office earlier that year.

The in-fighting erupted into full-fledged conflict believed to have left thousands of people dead and which has forced tens of thousands more to seek refuge at UN bases around the country. The political rivals signed an accord two weeks ago on ending the fighting, but Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has since urged maximum restraint by all parties amid accusations of breaches of the ceasefire.

Briefing the Security Council last week, the UN chief said that by the end of this year, half of South Sudan's 12 million people will be either in flight, facing starvation, or dead. According to UNICEF, at least half of these are children – the most innocent victims in what is increasingly becoming a children's emergency. Children and women constitute the majority of those fleeing to neighboring countries.

More than half a million children have fled the violence. Women and girls are increasingly sexually assaulted and the targets of gender-based violence. Schools and hospitals have been attacked or used by parties to conflict. More than 9,000 children have been recruited into armed forces by both sides. Thousands of children are separated from their families, within South Sudan and in neighboring countries.

UNICEF goes on to stress that across the country, as many as 50,000 children could die from malnutrition; 740,000 children under the age of five are at high risk of food insecurity. Many are already resorting to eating wild foods such as bulbs and grasses.

Although tireless efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance continue, without an all-inclusive political solution and a broader peace-building framework for promoting social cohesion, the crisis will deteriorate further, with profound consequences and impact on the most vulnerable, especially children.

"UNICEF repeats its call for all parties to provide unhindered and safe access for humanitarian assistance; and to respect
their own agreements to stop the violence against children, sexual and gender-based violence, and the recruitment of children,” the statement concludes.

**Somalia: UN deploys new special force to protect staff in Mogadishu**

18 May - A special United Nations defensive military force recommended by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to protect UN staff and facilities in Mogadishu, was deployed today to shore up the world body's operations in long-troubled Somalia.

According to a press release from the UN Assistance Mission, (UNSM), Nicholas Kay, Mission chief and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, presided over the formal inauguration of the first-ever United Nations Guard Unit (UNGU) for Mogadishu.

The UNGU is made up of 410 troops provided by the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF). The Guard Unit, led by a Ugandan Commander, falls under the responsibility of Mr. Kay, the UN designated official in Somalia. Officially starting its duties on 15 May, the Unit is a “static force” that will be based at Mogadishu International Airport.

This echoes Mr. Ban's vision that the Guard Unit would form part of the UN's overall security concept by providing “inner ring” static protection for the compounds of UNSOM and the UN Support Office for the African Union Mission in Somalia (UNSOA), located inside the airport.

“The deployment of the UN Guard Unit is an important step as we continue to expand our operations in support of the Somali people,” Mr. Kay said at the event. “We are deeply grateful to Uganda for its continued contribution to peace- and State-building in Somalia.”

He also thanked the Government and people of Somalia, and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), for their support for the Guard Unit “and for the protection they provide to the UN.”

“The Ugandan Government is committed to supporting our Somali brothers and sisters in their efforts to attain lasting peace,” said Lt. Gen. Charles Angina, Deputy Commander of the UPDF's Land Forces. “We are proud to join the UN family, and will do our utmost to ensure the UN is able to continue its work in Mogadishu under safe and secure conditions.”

The formation of the Guard Unit was approved by the UN Security Council following a recommendation for its deployment by the Secretary-General.

The UN launched with the African Union (AU) a joint assessment mission to Somalia from 26 August and 6 September 2013, amid deteriorating security in the country and in the wake of the attack on the UN common compound on 19 June 2013 in Mogadishu, in which one UN staff member, three personnel of a company contracted by the United Nations and four non-UN security guards were killed.

Mr. Ban recommended the establishment of a special protection force in a follow-up letter to the Security Council in which he expressed serious concern that the mission concluded that political progress made in Somalia in 2013 and the military gains against Al-Shabaab achieved in recent years “are at serious risk of being reversed.”

The UN chief sent another letter to the Council outlining his specific recommendations on the force strength and responsibilities of the Unit, which would “comprise a guard battalion and an extraction and reinforcement team, supported by an adequately composed logistic company.”
Colombia: Ban welcomes deal between Government, FARC to address illicit drugs

**17 May** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has today welcomed the agreement reached between Colombia’s Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) on dealing with illicit drugs in the country.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York, Mr. Ban welcomed the agreement reached yesterday by the negotiating parties in Havana, Cuba, which, according to media reports, would see the two sides working together to combat drug trafficking.

Reports also suggest the deal calls for FARC to also cooperate with the Government to assist farmers in growing crops other than coca, the plant used to make cocaine.

“A stepped up effort under this agreement to bring alternative development to regions plagued by illicit crops should mean a better life for many Colombians,” said the UN chief in his statement, which added that the agreement would also help counter the crime and violence associated with the trade in illegal narcotics.

“The Secretary-General commends the parties and encourages them to maintain the momentum in the peace talks,” the statement concludes.

Yesterday's agreement is the latest step in the ongoing Havana-based peace talks between the Colombian Government and the rebel group, FARC. In November 2013, the parties reached a deal on political participation and enhancing the role of women, which the Secretary-General also welcomed.

Some 600,000 people have died since the conflict between the country’s authorities and the FARC began in the 1960s. The two sides are working to end the long-running conflict through full implementation of the General Agreement for the End of the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, signed two years ago.

Ahead of Guinea-Bissau polls, UN chief urges high turnout, peaceful vote

**17 May** - On the eve of run-off presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has urged voters to show the same sense of civic duty exhibited during the first round of the polls “by turning out in large numbers and in a peaceful manner.”

“The Secretary-General continues to follow closely the situation on the eve of the 18 May, run off election…which is expected to bring the transition period to an end,” said a statement issued last evening by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.

“He commends all national stakeholders for their efforts to ensure a credible electoral process, and the two presidential candidates for having conducted a peaceful and orderly electoral campaign,” it continued, adding that the Secretary-General lauds the generous support of international partners in the electoral process.

“In casting their votes on 18 May, Bissau-Guineans will take another step towards stability,” said the statement, noting that Mr. Ban urges voters to show the same sense of civic duty exhibited in mid-April during the first round of presidential and legislative elections.

In phone calls yesterday with Nuno Gomes Nabiam and José Mario Vaz, the Secretary-General urged both presidential
candidates to respect the official results and follow existing legal procedures to resolve any electoral disputes.

“He trusts that both candidates will be guided by the best interest of the country, independently of the results,” said the statement, underscoring that the UN will continue to support the people of Guinea-Bissau as they conclude the transition, and begin the process of working towards re-building the State and promoting stability and sustainable development.

**On World Telecommunication Day, UN spotlights broadband for sustainable development**

17 May - With digital development now well recognized as a transformative tool to fast-track sustainable development, the United Nations is marking World Telecommunication and Information Society Day with calls on the global community to roll-out high-speed broadband networks, making digital communication affordable as well as universally accessible.

“Broadband connectivity is a critical element today in ensuring that information and communication technologies are used as effective delivery vehicles for health, education, governance, trade and commerce in order to achieve sustainable socio-economic growth,” declared Hamadoun I. Touré, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in his message on the Day.

Noting that the theme of this year’s Day is “Broadband for Sustainable Development”, he said that ITU’s efforts in line with that agenda focus on the dual goals of supporting the deployment of mobile broadband and the continued rollout of fixed-line technologies along with a thrust on meeting the global challenges of our times, such as combating climate change.

“I call upon our partners – Governments, industry, academia and technical experts – to identify key gaps in broadband research and development, [and ] infrastructure,” Mr. Touré said, also urging stakeholders to define policy priorities for action in the areas of allocating radio frequency spectrum for broadband, and to seek leading edge technological solutions, particularly in the extension of broadband access into rural areas, least developed countries and small island developing States.

In his message, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said broadband connectivity is a transformative tool to achieve the three pillars of sustainable development – economic growth, social inclusion and environmental balance.

“It is a key element of the debate on the post-2015 development agenda,” he said, stressing that broadband networks provide smart eco-friendly solutions to manage booming cities and transport systems; conduct long-distance diagnosis and treatment for patients in remote locations; and promote innovative educational applications for students around the world.

Noting that the ITU was approaching its 150th anniversary next year, he urged stakeholders to work together to bridge the digital divide and harness the power of technology to create a better and more sustainable future for all.

Echoing many of those sentiments UN General Assembly President John Ashe said that modern communication tools make it possible to connect the remotest communities and endow people with information and knowledge so they can realize their social, cultural and economic aspirations.

“As we look to advance the post-2015 development agenda through North-South, South-South cooperation, to use ICT to advance our development goals, and to set the stage for a more technologically inclusive world, I encourage us to seek every solution that information and communication technologies offer to create a better future for all,” he said.
Syria: Ban warns against targeting civilians after armed groups cut water supplies in Aleppo

17 May - Following reports that armed groups cut water supplies in Syria's flashpoint town of Aleppo, leaving at least 2.5 million people with no access to safe water for drinking and sanitation for days, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has warned that such deliberate targeting of civilians is a “clear breach” of international law.

A statement issued yesterday evening by a UN spokesperson in New York said Mr. Ban is concerned by reports that water supplies in the city of Aleppo were deliberately cut off by armed groups for eight days.

“The Secretary-General notes that preventing people's access to safe water is a denial of a fundamental human right,” said the statement, adding that deliberate targeting of civilians and depriving them of essential supplies is a clear breach of international humanitarian and human rights law.

While water supplies have since been restored, the Secretary-General, according to the statement, urged all parties to ensure that the water supply in Aleppo - and everywhere in Syria - is permanently restored and to refrain from targeting civilian facilities and infrastructure.

“He asks Member States and those with influence over all the parties to the conflict to remind them of their obligations,” said the statement.

'Speak up, speak out' against homophobia, UN urges on International Day

17 May - Leading the United Nations family's push to help build a world rooted in tolerance where lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons live free from discrimination, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon marked the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia with a strong plea for action: “Equality begins with you.”

“Human rights are for everyone, no matter who you are or whom you love,” the UN chief declared in a special LinkedIn blogpost on the International Day. His message was echoed by other senior officials who called not only for changes in discriminatory attitudes but also to laws on the books in many countries so all LGBT people could live with dignity.

Such changes are vital, said Mr. Ban, noting that in all parts of the world, LGBT people experience discrimination in every aspect of daily life. As children, too many are bullied by their peers, rejected by their own families, driven to drop out of school. As adults, too many suffer stigma, unfair treatment, even violence.

Fearing prejudice or persecution, many LGBT and intersex people are reluctant to discuss the simplest aspects of their personal lives with colleagues at work or in social settings.

“In 76 countries, having a partner of the same sex is even a prosecutable crime. People are arrested, imprisoned, and in some cases executed, just because they are in a loving relationship,” said the Secretary-General adding further that LGBT people also face deeply-ingrained hostility in the place where many of us spend most of our waking hours – at work.

“We must ask ourselves: Do we want to live in a world where love is targeted or where it is celebrated; where people live in fear or in dignity?,” declared the UN chief.

Noting that millions of people around the world observe the International Day, he said that the UN human rights office
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(UNHCHR) has released a short video as part of its Free & Equal campaign called The Power of Sharing.

“The video focuses on the impact that each of us can have by sharing our own stories and by showing our support for our LGBT colleagues, friends and family members. I encourage you all to watch the video and share it to help spread the word,” said Mr. Ban.

Changing people's attitudes takes time, effort and perseverance. “It takes us all to speak up and speak out against homophobia, even when it's presented as harmless fun or as an accepted cultural trait. It's not. It's discrimination. And it's our responsibility to fight it and to strive for a world that is truly free and equal,” the Secretary-General declared.

“Speaking up empowers us, it always has... And when enough people listen it can change the world,” affirms the OHCHR video, which underscores that individuals can effect positive change by sharing personal stories and by showing support for LGBT and intersex friends, colleagues and family.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay spoke earlier at the Fifth European Transgender Council about raising awareness of the discrimination and violence LGBT people face on a routine basis.

“As High Commissioner for Human Rights, I have always spoken out against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. And I have yet to come across a Government that says it supports violence and discrimination against LGBT people. Yet very few take action to protect people against such violations,” Ms. Pillay said.

For the first time, UN independent human rights experts and Special Rapporteurs have produced a joint statement for the Day.

It pinpoints, “States must build a climate of tolerance and respect in which all people, including LGBT … can express their thoughts and opinions without fear of being attacked, criminalized or stigmatized for doing so.”

Quoting late South African President Nelson Mandela, Michel Sidibé, Executive Director The Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) said: 'To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.'

With that in mind, the UNAIDS chief underscored that criminalization of LGBT people puts entire communities at risk. It keeps those in need of prevention and treatment services out of reach of life-saving interventions.

“It is outrageous that in 2014, when we have everything we need to defeat AIDS, we are still fighting prejudice, stigma, active discrimination and homophobic laws in 78 countries around the world,” he said, warning that stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity drive new HIV infections.

“We can only be free when we respect the freedom of our LGBT brothers and sisters.

Let us walk the road to freedom together, he said.

Echoing those concerns, Helen Clark, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) said that in the past year, harmful anti-LGBT laws have been passed under the guise of protecting children and families. “Punitive laws such as these have the potential to stir up homophobia and transphobia, and can have very toxic effects on people's lives,” she said.

Such laws scapegoat LGBT people and distract from the real social and development challenges which countries face. She stressed that anti-LGBT laws are based on the incorrect assumption that homosexuality poses a danger to a country's social fabric.

“The evidence does not demonstrate this – where nations have decriminalized same sex sexual conduct, no threat to the institution of marriage nor to the well-being of children has been witnessed,” said Ms Clark, explaining that, instead, decriminalization has been a key step in providing an opportunity for historically oppressed LGBT people to flourish and fully participate as respected members of society.
Security Council, Ban commend Guinea-Bissau as electors count ballots

19 May - With ballot counting underway in Guinea Bissau’s presidential run-off, the United Nations Security Council and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the successful conclusion of the second round of voting and urged the political parties to peacefully address any grievances arising from the elections through the appropriate channels.

In a statement read out to the press by Ambassador Oh Joon of the Republic of Korea, which holds the Council’s presidency for May, the 15-members called on all parties to respect “the democratic will of the people.”

They “call upon the security services to respect the constitutional order” including the election results, and reiterated “the demands to the security services to submit themselves fully to civilians control.”

The second round of presidential elections was held yesterday after citizens first went to the polls on 13 April. Postponed several times, the elections are the first to take place since the 2012 military coup which ousted interim President Raimundo Pereira. They are widely seen as essential to restoring constitutional order, economic growth and development.

“Once again, Bissau-Guineans have demonstrated their commitment to peace and democracy by turning out in large numbers to cast their ballots,” his spokesperson said in a statement from Mr. Ban who is currently on an official visit to China.

The successful conclusion of the elections “will go a long way to restoring constitutional order in Guinea-Bissau” and “usher in and consolidate the stability that has eluded the country for too long,” he said.

At UN Headquarters in New York, José Ramos-Horta, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) briefed the Council alongside the chair of the Peacebuilding Commission’s (PBC) Guinea-Bissau configuration, Antonio de Aguiar Patriota.

The 15-member Council will vote by the end of the month whether to renew the UNIOGBIS mandate, and if so, whether to change its mandate.

“The end of the transition is the beginning of a new phase which will require our continued engagement and full commitment to assist the people of Guinea-Bissau,” said Mr. Ramos-Horta via video teleconference from Guinea-Bissau. In the immediate post-election period, the newly elected Government would need emergency budgetary support to help it cover outstanding salaries in order to begin the necessary work of rebuilding the State in an atmosphere of calm and stability.

He went on to say that UN agencies, funds and programmes need the necessary support to help them provide technical assistance in effecting reform of the public administration, providing social services and revitalizing the economy.

International financial institutions should make every effort to support the socioeconomic revitalization of Guinea-Bissau, without which the new Government and the restored constitutional order would run the risk of collapsing very soon, he emphasized.

However, he went on to stress: “It is clear that the new, elected State institutions are inheriting a bleak political, social economic and security situation.” Major challenges must be tackled, with acrimonious civil-military relations and issues of civilian oversight yet to be addressed.

The new Government, Mr. Ramos-Horta continued, will need to mobilize all citizens to engage in a serious, inclusive and constructive dialogue, he said, adding that a consensual national programme of political stabilization and economic...
development must be the first step, alongside the fast-tracking of critical security sector reforms.

In helping the National Commission for Planning and Strategic Coordination prepare for the incoming Government, he said, UNIOGBIS has, among other activities, held workshops to identify proposals awaiting the new Government’s approval, which would address the need to update the National Strategy Document on security-sector reform and the rule of law.

“I believe we find ourselves today better positioned, from a technical point of view, to re-engage with Guinea-Bissau,” said Mr. Patriota, adding that the UN is also better positioned to devise a comprehensive and more effective strategy in support of legitimate authorities.

He added that the UN will work with the incoming Government on a new set of national peacebuilding priorities. Resources for such work would come in part from a donors conference which Mr. Ban has said would be held “as early as possible” to reign the potential of the country and “move past the cycle of poverty and instability.”