UN sounds alarm to end ‘global pandemic’ of violence against women

25 November - Violence against women and girls is a global pandemic that destroys lives, fractures communities and holds back development, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said as the world body today marked the International Day to End Violence against Women.

“But violence against women and girls does not emerge from nowhere. It is simply the most extreme example of the political, financial, social and economic oppression of women and girls worldwide,” Mr. Ban said at an Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) event at Headquarters.

Joining Mr. Ban at today’s panel discussion were UN Women Executive-Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka; First Lady of New York, Chirlane McCray, and actor Teri Hatcher, among others.

This year’s theme of Orange Your Neighbourhood promises grassroots action to raise awareness in local communities. For example, the UN Secretariat building and the Empire State Building were lit orange last night, and many wore orange today to show support and solidarity in ending the scourge that affects one in three women worldwide.

Violence against women is not confined to just one region, political system, culture or social class, Mr. Ban explained today. It is present at every level of every society in the world. It happens in peacetime and becomes worse during conflict.
This year alone, we have seen the kidnapping of more than 200 girls in Nigeria; the Indian schoolgirls who were raped, killed and hung from a tree; graphic testimony from Iraqi women of rape and sexual slavery during war; the continued bullying of women on the internet.

Governments, workplaces, universities and sports authorities are stepping up much-needed action to end sexual violence. More than 80 per cent of governments have passed laws on domestic violence and sexual harassment.

However, their implementation is often slow and uneven. And fragile gains continue to be threatened by extremism and a backlash against women’s rights.

“It is up to everyone to play their part; women’s rights are not only women’s business. Men and boys are finally taking their place as partners in this battle. The HeForShe campaign I launched two months ago brings together one half of humanity in support of the other,” Mr. Ban said.

Echoing that, UN-Women’s Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka explained that this Day is an opportunity to “shine an orange light” on violence against women that takes place at home, in schools, nations, cities, and villages. She urged for support to confront that “horror” and “extinguish it.”

“This is an important moment as the world is getting ready to gear up to the post-2015 plan of action,” Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said, highlighting that the issue of fighting violence against women will be high on the future global development agenda.

“No culture, no nation, no woman – old or young – is immune to this human rights violation,” she added.

“And these women are determined to reclaim their lives,” she said, urging that “there is no time for complacency or excuses, the time to act is now.”

“We need young people, members of Parliament and political parties, religious and traditional leaders as well as men and boys to play their roles,” the UN-Women chief explained.

“We know what works now. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiative, along with other studies, has generated quite some data and best practices that demonstrate that the importance of protecting women and girls and providing services to those who fall victim to these horrendous crimes.”

“We are in a unique position in history and a lot of will among the people of the world to forge ahead and conquer violence against women,” she said.

Recalling meeting women who have been victims of violence, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said that she “forever will be haunted by their suffering” but also inspired by their courage.

One of those personal stories shared today was that of actress Teri Hatcher, who hoped her experiences would “shed light on the dangers of remaining silent about sexual abuse.” Ms. Hatcher was abused by her uncle and after she remained silent about it, the man went on to abuse a young woman who later committed suicide.

Upon learning of that tragedy, Ms. Hatcher spoke up against her uncle, who was then convicted and sentenced to prison, where he died. “But nothing could undo the devastating violence he had caused,” she acknowledged.

“I’m the ‘one in three women,’” Ms. Hatcher said referring to statistics on the one billion women worldwide who suffer from violence, which forever affects self-esteem, self-worth and self-happiness.

“When society shames the victim by asking why did you stay instead of asking ‘why did he abuse her,’ we just…foster a society where the abuser continues to abuse,” Ms. Thatcher said stressing the need to break stigma so that victims are unafraid to speak up.

“As long as violence is a part of any woman’s story, silence will not be a part of mine,” she said.
Chirlane McCray, First Lady of New York, said that the Mayor’s office is “working day and night” to connect with women and girls in communities to inform them about the city centres available to those who suffer from violence.

“We know that violence against women and girls is a global problem that requires a global solution,” said Ms. McCray. But cities and local Governments such as New York’s can help in such efforts.

For instance, New York’s official first agreement with the UN – a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed today by the First Lady and UN Women’s Executive Director – commits to making areas in the city safe for all women and girls and free of sexual harassment.

“Every day, in cities across the globe, women and girls are trapped in lives defined by fear and violence. Here in New York City, we have launched a comprehensive effort to connect victims to the resources they need to break the cycle and establish their independence. But we must do even more, which is why we are joining the UN Women’s Safe Cities Global Initiative,” said Ms. McCray.

“We are committed to doing our part to create a world – and a city – where all women and girls can live their lives without fear of violence.”

New York is the first city in the United States to join the safe city initiative. The city is also leading on women’s leadership roles, as the city government’s majority is female and universal prekindergarten, a “game-changer” for many working mothers.

**Ban voices ‘deep concern’ over eruption of violence in Libya; urges return to dialogue**

25 November - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today voiced deep concern over an uptick in violence across Libya and urged all parties to recommit to the values of the revolution that inspired the North African country’s break towards democracy, according to a statement issued today by his spokesperson.

The UN has reported a recent escalation in hostilities in Libya amid air strikes in Tripoli and the Nafusa Mountains in the west as well as in Benghazi and its environs in the country’s east. The outburst of fighting comes just days after a UN-mediated ceasefire brought temporary relief to Benghazi and gave civilians there a much-needed reprieve from violence and an opportunity to evacuate and retrieve the bodies of the dead.

In his statement, Mr. Ban called on “all parties to end these attacks and prevent further escalation” and reminded them of their “moral and legal obligations to protect civilians and abide by international human rights and humanitarian law.”

In addition, the statement noted, the Secretary-General voiced deep concern about the reported violation of the UN’s premises in Tripoli on 24 November, stating that “such actions and incitement cannot be tolerated and must cease immediately.”

Since 2011 uprising that ousted former leader Muammar al-Qadhafi, violence amongst armed groups has spread throughout the North African country causing a humanitarian crisis.

According to numbers provided by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR), at least 106,420 people had fled their homes in October alone. Since May, a total of 393,400 people have been displaced.

Earlier in the summer, there seemed to be steps in the right direction with the election on 25 June of a national Parliament, a move the UN Mission hoped would thrust Libya toward political resolution. However earlier this month, Libya’s Supreme Court declared the national Parliament unconstitutional.

Moreover, on 11 November, Fatou Bensouda, a Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) warned the UN
Security Council about growing political instability in Libya. She said that the country is currently split with two governments vying for legitimacy.

Mr. Ban’s statement underscored his “full confidence” in his Special Representative in Libya, Bernardino Leone, and applauded his determination to “facilitate dialogue among Libyans” in an effort to bring about a return to an “inclusive political process.”

“The Secretary-General remains convinced that the only way to resolve the current crisis is through dialogue,” the statement continued. “He calls on all Libyans to recommit themselves to the goals of the revolution and take the brave decisions necessary to spare their country and people further strife and suffering, in particular by talking to one another in an environment of mutual respect and inclusiveness.”

UN rights chief concerned over ‘disproportionate’ killings of African-Americans by US police

25 November - The decision by a Grand Jury in Missouri to absolve a police officer for the fatal shooting of an African-American teenager has spotlighted broader concerns about institutionalized discrimination across the United States, the top United Nations human rights official said today.

“I am deeply concerned at the disproportionate number of young African Americans who die in encounters with police officers, as well as the disproportionate number of African Americans in US prisons and the disproportionate number of African Americans on Death Row,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, in a statement issued by his office in Geneva this morning.

“It is clear that, at least among some sectors of the population, there is a deep and festering lack of confidence in the fairness of the justice and law enforcement systems,” Mr. Zeid continued. “I urge the US authorities to conduct in-depth examinations into how race-related issues are affecting law enforcement and the administration of justice, both at the federal and state levels.”

Michael Brown was shot by a white police officer in the US town of Ferguson, in Missouri on 9 August, sparking protests around the country and enflaming the debate surrounding the treatment of African-American men by US law enforcement.

The High Commissioner explained that without knowing the specific details of the evidence laid before the state of Missouri Grand Jury, he remained unable to comment on whether or not the verdict itself conformed to international law. However, he said, continuing reports of deadly encounters between police officers and members of the African-American community had repeatedly prompted concerns among respected national bodies and by UN bodies monitoring the implementation of international human rights treaties.

Mr. Zeid noted that just two weeks ago, Mr. Brown’s parents had addressed the UN Committee against Torture, which is currently reviewing the US application of its obligations under the relevant Convention.

The Grand Jury’s decision last night to not charge the officer, Darren Wilson, comes just three days after another African-American, Tamir Rice, was shot dead by police in Cleveland, in the State of Ohio, because he was holding a non-lethal replica gun. Tamir Rice was 12 years-old.

Mr. Zeid noted that Tamir Rice’s killing not only reiterated the racial disparity in deaths at the hands of US police officers but also placed the issue of gun-related deaths in the US back into focus.

“In many countries, where real guns are not so easily available, police tend to view boys playing with replica guns as precisely what they are, rather than as a danger to be neutralized,” he stated.

Pointing to Article 9 of the UN’s Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, Mr.
Zeid confirmed that law enforcement officials were called upon to “not use firearms against persons except in self-defence or defence of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury.”

“In any event, intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life,” the High Commissioner concluded.

**Ebola: December 1 target for response may not be met in some areas of West Africa, UN reports**

25 November - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) said today that while Ebola response targets for December 1 in West Africa may be reached in many places, they may not be met in some areas, and confirmed two new cases in Mali amid ramped up efforts to reduce the likelihood that additional cases will be imported from neighbouring Guinea.

“The identification of patient contacts for daily monitoring has reportedly reached 99 per cent,” WHO said. “Based on experiences in Senegal and Nigeria, this achievement could augur well for rapid containment of Mali’s outbreak.” Senegal and Nigeria, which had been affected, are now Ebola-free.

“Most of these patients had symptom onset in early to mid-November, indicating ongoing chains of transmission,” WHO said in a press release that confirmed the two additional cases that brings to eight the total number of reported cases in Mali.

“With WHO support, staff from Mali’s Ministry of Health will be meeting with health officials from Guinea to discuss cross-border measures for coordinating control efforts and reducing the likelihood that additional cases will be imported from Guinea into Mali,” the UN health agency said.

The United Nations, as part of its intensified support to both the preparedness and response efforts of the Malian Government, will be opening on Wednesday an office of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) in Bamako, the capital.

UNMEERs’ Guinea office, meanwhile, reported that community reticence in many areas remains the main obstacle to contact tracing. Ebola is spreading in the north up to the border with Mali, an area with no functioning treatment centres or transit centres.

In response to a question at the UN press briefing in Geneva, WHO Spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said the December 1 targets for treatment and burials and set by his organization in its response to Ebola would likely be reached in many places, but not in others.

UNMEER head Anthony Banbury had said in media interviews that the mission is already exceeding its 1 December targets in some areas, but that it is almost certain the targets will not be reached in all areas.

The targets are the so-called “70-70-60 plan” which aims to try to get 70 per cent of the cases isolated and treated, and 70 per cent of the deceased safely buried within 60 days from the beginning of October to 1 December.

UNMEER also reported that 150 health workers from the West African countries of from Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger and Nigeria will be trained in Accra, Ghana this week to help tackle Ebola in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

In Liberia, UNMEER said it plans have two or three of its helicopters positioned in Monrovia by next week to ensure immediate dispatch of teams and supplies to any outbreak.

And as of today, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), $807.5 million of the $1.5 billion Ebola response plan for West Africa was funded, which represented 54 percent of the appeal met.
Meanwhile, the UN Global Compact will convene an event in New York on December 11 in cooperation with the Ebola Private Sector Mobilization Group, a coalition of over 35 companies with major assets and operations in West Africa mobilizing business resources, to support front-line Ebola humanitarian relief efforts while also advocating for a more concerted global response to the outbreak and recovery.

Along with counterparts from the UN, governments and civil society, CEOs will gather at this event to share examples of interventions by business to support the Ebola response, identify lessons learned, explore how successes can be replicated and discuss the role of business in long-term recovery, according to the UN Global Compact.

**Sanctions are ‘effective’ method to build global stability, Security Council told**

25 November - From Afghanistan and Angola to Haiti and the former Yugoslavia, sanctions implemented by the United Nations Security Council have had a positive track record, proving their efficacy and economy in supporting Member States overcome instability, the top UN political official said today.

“UN sanctions have proved to be an effective complement to other Security Council instruments and actions.” Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, said in a briefing to the Council on the evolution of UN sanctions. “We know it is not perfect, but there is also no doubt that it works.”

The usage of sanctions has had a long and storied history within the UN body since its first application in 1966 on Southern Rhodesia. Since then, 25 sanctions regimes have been implemented for a wide range of purposes – from being used to support conflict resolution efforts to the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, and counter terrorism.

Currently, noted the Under-Secretary-General, 15 sanctions regimes are in place – the highest number in the history of the Organization – at a “comparatively modest” cost of under $30 million a year to manage.

Despite the long-standing use of sanctions, Mr. Feltman recalled that the Council had also shown its capacity to “continuously innovate and adjust its sanctions regime” with the “most significant transformation” being the 1994 shift from comprehensive to targeted sanctions, comprising travel bans, asset freezes, arms embargoes, bans on the trade of commodities (diamonds, coal, wildlife products, charcoal), restrictions on items, material, equipment, goods and technology related to nuclear ballistic missiles and other weapons of mass destruction programmes, as well as bans on the export of certain luxury goods.

In addition, the 1999 introduction of sanctions monitoring groups formed the basis of another “important innovation” leading to the 11 monitoring groups, teams and panels currently working world-wide in support of the Security Council and its sanctions committees.

Nevertheless, he explained that much work was to be done to raise the awareness of Member States that UN sanctions are meant to be “supportive not punitive.”

“They are not meant to cripple states but to help them overcome instability, address massive human rights violations, curb illegal smuggling, and counter terrorism,” he told the Council members.

“Some Member States already do understand this and have requested the Security Council to adopt, fine-tune or strengthen targeted measures, to support their fragile political transitions and national reconciliation efforts. Many others request the Council to strengthen targeted measures to help protect against terrorism and other illicit activities.”

At the same time, Jürgen Stock, INTERPOL’s Secretary-General, briefed the Council on his organization’s role in enhancing sanctions implementation through its global law enforcement network.
“INTERPOL supports the implementation of UN sanctions by enhancing the quality of information available to the sanctions Committees,” Mr. Stock told delegates.

“In addition to this support, INTERPOL also assists in the effective implementation of specific UN sanctions, related to individuals – such as the travel ban and asset freezing – and goods – like the arms embargo and illegal natural resource exploitation,” he explained.

Mr. Stock outlined how his agency remained keen on hearing new ideas on how to improve sanctions implementation and emphasized the importance of strengthening INTERPOL’s alliance with the UN.

To that point, in his briefing, Mr. Feltman delineated a series of proposals for the Council’s consideration on how to better coordinate the sanctions process, including the increased use of assessment missions to take stock of the impact of sanctions; the expansion of the relevant designation criteria to address specific human rights violations; the creation of a “clear and standardized listing/delisting framework;” and the strengthening of due process when considering the designation of individuals and entities.

“More work is also needed to provide assistance to Member States implementing UN sanctions. This will clearly take effort and resources,” he continued. “And some more work is needed to take into greater account the rights of individuals, entities and Member States designated for targeted measures.”

He acknowledged, however, that despite the improvements and updates required, the UN’s sanctions regime still functioned accordingly.

“UN sanctions, in short, work,” he said.

**Syria: humanitarian efforts falling short, UN relief chief warns, calling for end to violence**

25 November - While humanitarians have made some progress in delivering much-needed supplies to the growing numbers of people in conflict-riven Syria, efforts by the United Nations and its partners are still falling short, a top UN relief official has said today, calling on the Security Council to push for an end to the violence that is destroying the country and destabilizing the region.

“This is a conflict that is affecting every Syrian,” said Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, in a briefing to the Security Council this afternoon on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

“We have lamented the possibility of a lost generation of Syria’s children: it is now a reality,” she added.

Specifically, Ms. Amos said Syria’s economy has contracted some 40 per cent since 2011, with unemployment now exceeding 54 per cent. In addition, three quarters of the population live in poverty, and school attendance has dropped by more than 50 per cent.

She noted that Council resolution 2165 – which was adopted in July and aims at increasing access to people most in need – has helped the UN to overcome some of the challenges faced, by permitting direct delivery to hundreds of thousands of people, complementing the considerable cross-border deliveries conducted by non-governmental organizations.

Since the adoption of the resolution and primarily through cross-border deliveries, supplies had been distributed in nearly all the hard-to-reach locations in the four governorates, leading to a more effective response, she noted.

However, no more than two besieged locations have been reached in any month since the adoption of the resolution, and only one location has been reached in each of the past two months.
“Despite the progress we have made, it is still not enough,” Ms. Amos stressed. “We have faced considerable challenges in implementing resolutions 2139 and 2165 and continue to fall short of meeting the humanitarian needs of all the people we aim to reach in Syria,” she added.

Council resolution 2139, from February 2014, demands that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, allow humanitarian access in Syria across conflict lines, in besieged areas and across borders.

At the passing of resolution 2139 in February, there were 220,000 people besieged by either Government or opposition forces; of those, 212,000 remain besieged today, she noted.

Ms. Amos also emphasized that the Council should continue to call for an end to the “bureaucratic steps” that hinder the delivery of assistance, as well as push for the inclusion of medical supplies in convoys and call for the lifting of sieges.

Noting that some 12.2 million people – more than 5 million of them children – are now in urgent need of humanitarian assistance throughout the country, Ms. Amos said that continuing violence has forced nearly half of Syrians from their homes, many of them multiple times.

Consequently, there are now some 7.6 million people displaced inside Syria. In addition, more than 3.2 million people have fled the country, with countries in the region and communities hosting refugees bearing an “enormous burden,” Ms. Amos stressed.

Moreover, Ms. Amos said that despite repeated calls from the Council for the fighting to stop and “hard-hitting” reports from the Independent Commission of Inquiry of ongoing abuses of human rights, civilians continue to be killed and injured every day in Syria.

“As the situation on the ground becomes more dangerous and difficult it is even more important that humanitarian actors are able to use all tools at their disposal to reach people in need, from within the country and across borders,” Ms. Amos said.

In addition, Ms. Amos emphasized that humanitarian appeals for Syria and the region remain critically underfunded, with the appeal less than half funded.

“Every day that passes more Syrian children, women and men die,” Ms. Amos said. “More look to the international community for help and support. We on the humanitarian side will continue to do all we can,” she added.

The conflict in Syria, which began in March 2011, has led to over 150,000 deaths, and more than 680,000 people have been injured. It has also spawned a refugee crisis in which some 2.5 million people are being sheltered in neighbouring countries. At least 10.8 million people are in need of assistance inside Syria, including at least 6.5 million who are internally displaced.
As number of South Sudanese refugees grows, UN relief official urges support to Ethiopia

25 November - Following the end of a four-day mission to Ethiopia, a senior United Nations relief official has called for continued international attention to the plight of South Sudanese refugees, warning that the number of refugees could rise substantially if fighting in South Sudan persists.

In a press release issued today by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, noted that nearly 194,000 South Sudanese refugees – 90 per cent of them women and children – have arrived in Ethiopia since the conflict in South Sudan began this past December.

“Without a political solution, and with more fighting and major food security challenges in South Sudan, that number could rise to 350,000 by the end of the first quarter of 2015,” she warned.

On Saturday, Ms. Kang travelled to the Gambella region in western Ethiopia, where she met refugees from South Sudan in Tierkidi camp. Ethiopia currently hosts more than 600,000 refugees, the largest refugee population in Africa.

Noting that she was impressed by the collaborative efforts of the Ethiopian Government’s Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) and humanitarian partners, she emphasized that current funding is not enough to ensure that all refugees receive humanitarian assistance and services.

She also stressed that while the South Sudanese refugee crisis in western Ethiopia is the newest emergency in the country, the plight of Eritrean and Somali refugees must also “be kept on the radar.”

“I thank the people and Government of Ethiopia for their generosity in welcoming refugees from neighbouring countries and for their tireless efforts to respond to people’s needs,” Ms. Kang said.

“But much more financial resources are needed. I urge the international community to match the generosity of Ethiopian and other countries hosting South Sudanese refugees with funds needed to support the South Sudan refugee appeal,” she added.

During her visit, the humanitarian official also spent two days in Addis Ababa meeting members of the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team and representatives from non-governmental organizations.

Ms. Kang also met with Mitiku Kassa, the State Minister of Agriculture, and discussed the need to increase longer-term development and invest in community resilience to reduce chronic humanitarian needs.

In addition, Ms. Kang met the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission and Principals of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and discussed humanitarian challenges facing the Horn of Africa.

Political in-fighting between South Sudan President Salva Kiir and his former deputy, Riek Machar, started in mid-December 2013 and subsequently turned into a full-fledged conflict that has sent nearly 100,000 civilians fleeing to UNMISS bases around the country. The crisis has uprooted some 1.5 million people and placed more than 7 million at risk of hunger and disease.
International community has duty to protect minorities, UN deputy chief tells Geneva forum

25 November - It is the international community’s duty to draw lessons from the horrific violence and atrocious crimes facing minorities around the world to prevent them from being repeated, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said today at a forum on minority issues.

Speaking to the 7th Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues on “Preventing and Addressing Violence and Atrocity Crimes Targeted against Minorities,” Mr. Eliasson explained that simply saying “never again” is not enough.

“We have all seen the unfolding tragedy in Iraq and Syria where Christians, Turkmens, Yezidis and other minorities have been targeted for the most brutal atrocities,” he said.

“Sadly, this is not an exception. Violence and atrocity crimes directed against minorities all over the world are well documented, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide,” Mr. Eliasson.

The United Nations as a whole and all Member States must renew commitments and intensify efforts to promote and protect minority rights worldwide. To that end, he said that the Forum plays an important part, by helping stakeholders understand the nature of such crimes, root causes and inherent dynamics.

Minority rights are a vital component of all three pillars of the United Nations: peace, development and human rights. They require the systematic and coordinated engagement of every part of the UN system.

This interdependence is at the heart of the Human Rights Up Front initiative, which calls for a system-wide effort to prevent and respond to serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, Mr. Eliasson said.

He called on Member States to exercise their moral and political responsibility and take early action when confronted with evidence or known risk factors for atrocity crimes. The Human Rights Council and the High Commissioner for Human Rights also have a crucial role to play.

“This Forum and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues are clear demonstrations of the serious intent and commitment of the United Nations to protect the rights of minorities,” the Deputy Secretary-General said.

The forum on minority issues was established in 2007 following a Human Rights Council resolution to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

The Forum meets annually for two working days allocated to thematic discussions.
Timor-Leste: UN expert warns dismissal of judicial officials may have ‘chilling effect’

25 November - The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Gabriela Knaul, today warned that the audit of the justice sector and the dismissal of all international judicial personnel from Timor-Leste puts at risk the independence of the judiciary in the country.

“I am troubled that the decision may have been taken in retaliation for court judgments which displeased members of the Government and the Parliament,” Ms. Knaul said, adding that she had already raised the issue with the authorities and urged them to reconsider their decision.

In two separate resolutions dated 24 October, the Timor-Leste Parliament and Government called for an audit of the courts and the immediate contract termination of all international judicial personnel and advisers working in the justice sector.

In another resolution dated 31 October, the Government singled out eight international staff – five judges, two prosecutors and one adviser – and ordered them to leave the country within 48 hours.

“The resolutions represent a serious interference in the independence of the judiciary,” Ms. Knaul said, stressing that the immediate dismissal of international judicial personnel could undermine the proper administration of justice in Timor-Leste, including access to justice and due process guarantees.

“It may also have a chilling effect on national members of the judiciary, affecting their independence,” she warned.

Ms. Knaul also cautioned that this situation may further result in the suspension of trials in cases of crimes against humanity and other serious crimes committed in 1999, as the law requires that the panels set up to consider these crimes comprise of two international judges.

Admittedly, Timor-Leste has made great progress in building its judicial institutions over the past decade, she said, highlighting the essential role played by international judicial personnel in the national capacity-building process.

While the reduction of the number of international judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals is a legitimate path to follow, it should be a process implemented in full conformity with international human rights law and standards, as well as national laws and procedures.

“I urge both Parliament and Government to reconsider their decisions and initiate a dialogue with the relevant partners, including the UN, to address this serious situation and map an appropriate way forward in compliance with Timor-Leste’s international human rights obligations,” she added.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based 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.
Security Council extends UN mission in South Sudan through May 2015

25 November - Expressing “grave alarm about the further deteriorating political, security and humanitarian crisis” in South Sudan, the Security Council today extended the United Nations Mission the country (UNMISS) for an additional six months, maintaining the operation’s mandate to focus on civilian protection, facilitation of relief assistance, and human rights monitoring.

In an adopted resolution, the Council decided to extend the Mission until 30 May 2015. In doing so, the Council authorized, as it had previously, UNMISS to use “all necessary means” to protect civilians, monitor and investigate human rights, create the conditions for delivery of humanitarian assistance, and support the implementation of the cessation of hostilities agreement.

The Council also requested UNMISS to focus and streamline its activities, across its military, police and civilian components, in order to achieve progress on the above-mentioned tasks, and recognized that “certain Mission tasks will therefore be ceased.”

In addition, in the resolution the Council also demanded that the Government of South Sudan and all relevant parties fully cooperate in UNMISS’ deployment, operations and monitoring, verification and reporting functions.

Further, the resolution calls upon the Government of South Sudan to ensure freedom of movement for internally displaced persons, including those leaving and entering protection of civilian sites, and to continue to support UNMISS by allocating land for such sites.

The authorized troop and police strengths of the Mission will remain 12,500 and 1,323, respectively, as was decided by the Council in late December 2013, after political in-fighting between President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar turned into a full-fledged conflict that has sent nearly 100,000 civilians fleeing to UNMISS bases around the country. The crisis has uprooted some 1.5 million people and placed more than 7 million at risk of hunger and disease.

Haiti: UN mission chief urges calm, respect for rights in wake of protests

25 November - Amid rising tensions Port-au-Prince and other key Haitian cities in the wake of last month’s delayed elections, the top United Nations official in the country deplored the violence that recently caused injuries among demonstrators and called on all sides to respect the right to free expression while also avoiding any recourse to violence.

“The freedom to demonstrate and freedom of expression are rights guaranteed by international conventions, enshrined in the Haitian constitution and supported by the law,” said Sandra Honoré, head of the UN Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) in a press release issued yesterday evening.

According to press reports, an anti-Government protest is scheduled for Tuesday, November 25 at Port-au-Prince and several provincial cities. It followed another protest on November 18 that resulted in several injuries.

“The right to demonstrate and freedom of opinion is a sign of the consolidation of democracy in Haiti and efforts must be
made to both sides to avoid any recourse to violence, defamation, intimidation of all kinds, or acts that may contribute to the peace and stability,” said Ms. Honoré.

“As part of strengthening the rule of law, it is up to the Haitian authorities to take the necessary measures to ensure that the right to peaceful protest is respected and that offenders are prosecuted,” she said.

"The period from November 25 to December 10 marks the 16 days of activism for the protection of human rights, it is up to all to reject violence in all its forms to move towards a stronger Haiti, more stable and more respectful the rights of all and all," she said.

**Security Council extends UN Guinea-Bissau office for three months**

*25 November* - The Security Council today extended the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peace-Building Office in Guinea-Bissau, known as UNIOGBIS, so that it can continue to assist in tackling a range of political, security and development challenges in the country.

UNIOGBIS’ mandate was extended for a period of three months, beginning on 1 December 2014 until 28 February 2015. This past May, the Council agreed to extend the mission’s mandate until 30 November.

Specifically, UNIOGBIS will focus on, among other tasks, supporting an inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation process to facilitate democratic governance, and assisting in strengthening democratic institutions and enhancing the capacity of State organs to function effectively and constitutionally.

The Office will also continue to provide strategic and technical advice and support for the establishment of effective and efficient law enforcement and criminal justice and penitentiary systems, as well as advice and support to implement the reform of the national security sector.

In its resolution, the Council reiterated concern about reports of continuing violations and abuses of human rights, and called on the Government of Guinea-Bissau to conduct “transparent and credible” investigations into all alleged human rights violations and abuses, and to hold those responsible accountable for their actions.

The Council also reiterated its deep concern at the threat to stability posed by drug trafficking, emphasizing the need to tackle the problem in the countries of origin, transit and final destination.

Among other measures, the Council called upon the authorities of Guinea-Bissau to review, adopt and implement national legislations and mechanisms to more effectively combat transnational organized crime.

In addition, in the resolution the Council also requested that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Miguel Trovoada, increase efforts to achieve “greater coherence, coordination and efficiency” among relevant UN agencies, funds and programmes in Guinea-Bissau to maximize their collective effectiveness towards combating drug trafficking.

Earlier this year, the West African nation concluded a second round of presidential elections, which are widely seen as essential to restoring constitutional order, economic growth and development following a 2012 military coup.
UNESCO chief denounces murder of Somali radio journalist

25 November - The head of the United Nations agency tasked with defending press freedom has deplored the murder of Abdirisak Ali Abdi, a journalist killed in the town of Galkayo, Somalia, and called for a thorough investigation into the crime.

“I condemn the killing of Abdirisak Ali Abdi,” said a statement by the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Irina Bokova. “I call on the authorities to take every possible measure to protect the safety of journalists and to improve their ability to do their work keeping the public informed.”

Mr. Abdi, who worked as a contributor for various media outlets including Radio Daljir and HornCable TV, was gunned down in a restaurant on 18 November by two unknown assailants.

“Every effort must be made to bring those responsible for the killing of Abdirisak Ali Abdi to trial,” Ms. Bokova’s statement continued.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has described Somalia as one of the top 10 countries where crimes against journalists go unpunished. In addition, media workers risk not just death on a daily basis but also arbitrary arrests, as happened earlier this year when a reporter was accused of fabricating a rape story based on an interview which was never published.

Israel’s demolition of Palestinian homes ‘contrary to international law,’ UN experts warn

25 November - The Israeli Government’s use of house demolition as a punitive measure in response to alleged acts of violence by Palestinians must end immediately, two United Nations experts urged today, adding that the practice – which targets Palestinian homes in both Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory – is a violation of human rights law.

“All acts of violence require a firm response from the Israeli authorities, and those responsible should be tried before a court of law and sentenced for their crimes,” Makarim Wibisono, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, affirmed in a press release, adding, however, that the State “cannot go beyond what is sanctioned by international law.”

Mr. Wibisono’s remarks follow the 19 November demolition of the East Jerusalem home of Abd al-Rahman al-Shaludi, the Palestinian man accused of committing last month’s car attack in Jerusalem that claimed the lives of a 22 year-old woman and a three-month old child.

In addition to Mr. Al-Shaludi’s home, Israeli authorities have slated at least six other homes of Palestinian suspects located in East Jerusalem, Askar refugee camp, and Hebron, for demolition or sealing – the practice of completely or partially closing off the rooms of a home with concrete or metal sheeting, prohibiting family members from accessing their homes, at times indefinitely. Meanwhile, following a recent deadly attack against a Jerusalem synagogue, a number of other house demolitions are reportedly being prepared.

“In the case of Mr. Al-Shaludi, who was shot and killed by Israeli police at the scene of the attack, the demolition of his home in the middle of the night served no other purpose than to punish his innocent parents and five siblings, rendering them homeless,” Leilani Farha, the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, explained.
“Simply put: the use of house demolition as a punitive measure is a form of collective punishment contrary to international law,” she continued. “Israel must immediately end its use of this devastating practice.”

The recent house demolitions come within a context of increasing tensions – marked by a number of fatal incidents – between Palestinians and Israelis.

However, the two Special Rapporteurs warned that an upsurge in demolitions would “only add to the frustration and despair felt by the people living under prolonged military occupation, and sow the seeds of more hatred and violence for the future.”

“The only means to stop this cycle of violence is for Israel to place human rights at the centre of its policy-making,” Mr. Wibisono concluded.

Burundi: UN expert urges defence of human rights activists to promote transparency

25 November - The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders expressed regret today that defenders in Burundi are deemed to be political opponents, saying that in reality they are activists working to promote and protect human rights and civil liberties.

In a press release issued by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the expert, Michel Forst, emphasized that threats and defamation campaigns by certain media outlets weigh on human rights defenders, who also report a high number of cases of physical threats, anonymous phone calls, assaults, arbitrary arrest and judicial harassment.

“I was very struck by the incredible vitality and professionalism of civil society in Burundi despite the difficult environment in which they work,” Mr. Forst said.

“They face serious obstacles that can amount to violations of their rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as their legitimate right to promote and protect human rights,” he added.

The Special Rapporteur stressed that while Burundi is fortunate to have a “dynamic” civil society and a “bold and free” press, the country’s public authorities attempt to restrict their freedom of expression by accusing them of being opposition actors when they report on events or testimonies questioning State institutions.

He said he shared his concerns with the Government regarding provisions of the law on the press that are contrary to international obligations. In particular, he noted the requirement that journalists reveal their sources, which would limit effective enjoyment of freedom of expression.

Mr. Forst highlighted the cases of the arrests and repeated threats made against certain journalists and radio stations dealing with politically sensitive topics, such as the allegations of arms distribution or the “controversial” methods of issuing identity cards.

In particular, he noted that the arrest and detention this past May of Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, a human rights defender, and the disbarment of Isidore Rufyikiri, the president of the Bar, constitute an “unacceptable escalation of the harassment of defenders” by the State’s authorities.

“A free, independent, and occasionally impertinent press, able to expose abuses of power and corruption, is essential to preserve civil liberties and to promote transparency and foster broad participation in public life,” Mr. Forst said.

Freedom of assembly and demonstration is guaranteed by the Constitution of Burundi, but in practice only protests in favour of the Government are reportedly authorized, while all others are “systematically prohibited,” the Special Rapporteur said.
“By adopting an abusive interpretation of the concept of public order, in effect, the authorities muzzle freedom of assembly and demonstration in public spaces,” Mr. Forst said.

The Special Rapporteur also pointed out that the draft law on associations being considered by Parliament includes provisions that hamper the creation and development of associations and that would “imperil the very principle of free association.”

The approval or annual renewal of such provisions poses a threat to the sustainability of certain associations, he said. In addition, he stressed that the appointment of the heads of associations by the Minister of the Interior and his power to suspend the activities of an association are contrary to international norms.

The Special Rapporteur will present his conclusions in a report to the UN Human Rights Council.