Ukraine: UN political chief says events over past four days 'should alarm us all'

29 April - Describing “alarming” developments in Ukraine – from the capture of European observers to the violent takeover of Government buildings by separatist groups, and the shooting of the mayor of a major eastern city – a senior United Nations official this evening appealed to all sides to “work expeditiously” at putting the crisis-torn country on the path to stability.

“The implementation of the Geneva Statement has stalled as parties have sought to give different interpretations of what had been agreed upon,” he said of the 17 April deal on a series of steps to de-escalate tensions in eastern Ukraine that reportedly include demobilizing militias and vacating seized Government buildings.

“Unhelpful rhetoric on the part of many has further escalated the already high tensions,” he added.

The Geneva Statement capped months of political unrest in Ukraine that led to the removal by Parliament of President Viktor Yanukovych in February. This was followed by increased tensions in the country’s autonomous region of Crimea, where Russian military were subsequently deployed and a secession referendum was held in mid-March, in which the majority of the region’s people voted to join Russia.
By mid-April, tensions flared in eastern Ukraine as Lugansk, Kharkiv, Donetsk and at least 5 other cities in the region were targeted by uprisings and the violent takeover of Government buildings. And in the city of Slovyansk, where the police station was seized, self-declared separatist groups reportedly demanded a referendum similar to the poll held in Crimea.

Mr. Feltman reported today that the situation in parts of eastern and southern Ukraine continues to deteriorate. On 25 April, a group of military observers under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and accompanying Ukrainian staff were captured and detained. Although one monitor has been released, the rest remain in detention.

Reiterating UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s strong condemnation of the incident, Mr. Feltman urged those responsible to release the detainees immediately, unconditionally and unharmed. He also urged those with influence on the situation to assist urgently in resolving it; “lives are potentially at stake.”

Meanwhile, he said, gangs of militia and armed civilians “are increasing in number and springing up in more and more cities across the region,” seizing buildings, setting up roadblocks and cutting whole towns and communities off from the rest of Ukraine. There are increasing reports of torture, kidnappings and violent clashes, he added.

“Earlier today, self-declared separatist groups reportedly began an operation to take control of Lugansk. Just a few hours ago, they stormed the police headquarters in the city, opening fire with automatic weapons and throwing stun grenades at police offices still inside,” said Mr. Feltman, adding that the State Security building seized earlier this month remained under control of those groups.

He went on to tell the Council that yesterday, Hennadiy Kerned, the Mayor of Kharkiv, was shot in the back by unknown assailants and remains in critical condition. “On the same day, self-declared separatists seized a local government building in Kostyantynivka, also in the Donetsk Oblast.

While in Donetsk itself, a pro-Unity rally turned violent when separatist elements reportedly attacked the group with clubs and chains,” he said, adding that two days ago, clashes between some 400 opponents and between 400 and 500 supporters of a unitary Ukraine broke out and resulted in a number of injuries.

“What I just described are developments which have occurred only in the last four days. These developments should alarm us all,” Mr. Feltman declared.

As for the efforts of the international community, he said that the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission provides fact-based and publicly available information on the state of human rights in Ukraine. In addition, the Secretary-General has continued his high-level engagement with world leaders.

“He is your partner in using his good offices to help bring about a return to diplomacy and a peaceful resolution. In this spirit, he has asked me to return to Ukraine next week,” Mr. Feltman announced.

Reiterating the call made yesterday by Mr. Ban, he said: “We must find a way back to the spirit of compromise exhibited on 17 April in Geneva. A diplomatic and political solution to this crisis is both imperative and long overdue.”

“Let us work concertedly and expeditiously towards peace and stability,” Mr. Feltman said.
After deadly attack, UN agency urges safety for displaced in Central African Republic

29 April - At least two people were killed and six others injured in the Central African Republic (CAR) after an attack on an 18-truck humanitarian convoy relocating 1,300 Muslims to safety in the country’s north, a spokesperson for the United Nations refugee agency today confirmed, renewing calls for protection of displaced people.

“The convoy, heading for Kabo and Moyen in the north, was hit by a grenade believed to have been thrown by anti-balaka militiamen,” UNHCR spokesperson Fatoumata Lejeune told journalists in Geneva, referring to yesterday’s attack believed to have been carried out by the mostly Christian armed group.

The anti-balaka, which translates as “machete proof,” are fighting mostly Muslim Séléka rebels who led a 2012 coup. Since then, hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced and 2.2 million are in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

“UNHCR condemns the attack and offers its condolences to the victims’ families. It underscores the need to provide physical protection to displaced communities at risk,” said Ms. Lejeune.

According to information from the UN agency, the 18-truck convoy was moving people previously trapped in the troubled PK 12 neighbourhood of the war-torn capital, Bangui, where they fled to escape inter-communal violence.

However, PK 12 later came under threat, leaving the displaced in constant fear of attacks without enough food and living in squalid conditions because of lack of sanitation facilities. The move came at the request of the people themselves. This was the second relocation operation from PK 12, following the movement of 93 people, including 35 children, to Bambari on April 20.

The convoy has since continued its journey to Kaga Bandoro, where injured received medical assistance.

“A UNHCR team accompanying the convoy reported that three babies have so far been born during the journey,” said Ms. Lejeune.

Chemical watchdog announces probe into alleged chlorine gas attacks in Syria

29 April - The head of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) said today it will seek to “establish the facts” surrounding allegations of the use of chlorine in Syria, where it is already working jointly with the United Nations to rid the country of its chemical weapons.

According to media reports, opposition activists say the Syrian Government has attacked rebel-held areas with chlorine gas. The Government denies the claims.

OPCW Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü announced the creation of the fact-finding mission at a meeting of the body’s Executive Council held in The Hague.

The Syrian Government has agreed to accept the mission and will provide security in areas under its control, the OPCW said in a news release. The investigative team is expected to depart for Syria soon.

“The Secretary-General has expressed his support and assured the assistance of the United Nations in meeting the significant security and logistical demands of this mission,” UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told reporters in New York.
Last week, the Joint Mission of the OPCW and the UN (OPCW-UN) said that 92.5 per cent of Syria’s chemical weapons material has been removed or destroyed in country, including all declared production, mixing and filling equipment and munitions, as well as some buildings associated with the country’s chemical weapons programme.

The deadline for the completion of this process is 30 June 2014, the date set by the OPCW Executive Council and the UN Security Council.

The alleged use of chlorine gas is just the latest development in the ongoing conflict, which has caused untold suffering for millions of civilians over the past three years.

**Facing ‘moment of truth,’ Mid-east parties must make tough choices to salvage peace efforts – UN envoy**

29 April - In the wake of Israel’s decision to break off talks with the Palestinians after a Fatah-Hamas unity deal, and amid a “volatile” situation on the ground with negative trends in the West Bank and a fragile calm in Gaza, a United Nations envoy today challenged the parties to use this “moment of truth” to reflect on the hard choices required to keep peace from slipping further away.

“Inaction could see this turn into a crisis. That is why joint reflection is in order on how the current impasse came about and ways to overcome it,” Robert Serry, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, warned the Security Council in a briefing on the current “political stalemate” that has endangered what many see as perhaps the last chance to achieve the long-sought two-State solution.

He said that nine months since the launch of United States-brokered negotiations on the previously agreed objective of achieving a comprehensive settlement on all core issues by 29 April, “efforts have faltered given the inability of the parties to bridge the gaps on their substantive positions or even accept, with reservations, a US framework that would attempt to do just that.”

Summing up the events of the past two months, Mr. Serry said that on 28 March, Israel postponed its decision to follow through with the release of the fourth and last tranche of 30 pre-Oslo prisoners. On 1 April, interpreting this as a breach of the quiet understanding of a diplomatic truce in return for the release of the prisoners, the Palestinians proceeded with submitting accession instruments to 15 international treaties and conventions.

“The announcement of 708 reissued tenders for settlement units in Gilo on the same day added to the Palestinian conviction that they had no other choice. Nevertheless, President Mahmoud Abbas reiterated his commitment to negotiations, Mr. Serry said, adding that despite these events, the negotiators continued to meet in an effort to find a way out of the impasse.

In a subsequent development, Palestinians reached a unity agreement on 23 April stipulating, among other things, that a National Consensus Government would be formed within five weeks and elections held no later than six months after the formation of this Government. “Israel [then] cancelled a meeting scheduled between the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators and after an emergency cabinet meeting on 24 April, took the decision to suspend the talks,” he said.

The political stalemate poses great risks to the prospects of a two-State solution and “will also not be without impact…on the ground,” he continued, noting that 2013 had seen the highest number of Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank since 2009.

Condemning the “appalling” violence, he noted two particularly disturbing instances: the killing of an Israeli man and the injury of two others, including a child, in an attack near Hebron on 14 April, during Passover; and the shooting by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) of a 14-year-old Palestinian boy crossing the Barrier on 19 March, which resulted in his death.

Mr. Serry said the rise in violence in the West Bank was reflected by the following trends, among others: increased clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians, particularly in and around refugee camps; Palestinian stone and Molotov
cocktail throwing resulting in some injuries and material damage; and settler attacks against Palestinians and their property in spite of some Israeli efforts to crack down on so-called “Price Tag” attacks which have also targeted Israeli security forces.

“Settlement activity also continued,” he said, adding that the situation in East Jerusalem remains worrisome as tensions and clashes in the Old City continued, including during the holiday period. “All of this points to the fact that the situation on the ground is serious and likely to further deteriorate if not addressed. And we must not forget Gaza, where practical steps are urgently needed to improve the humanitarian and security situation.”

Against this troubling backdrop, Mr. Serry said: “Difficult choices are now required of the parties. They should realize that not making a choice is the most detrimental choice of all – namely to accept that we are going down the path of a one-State reality on the ground. This is a time for the parties to reflect whether they wish to live up to their stated commitment to the two-State solution, or whether they will by default let it slip further away.”

First and foremost, he urged the parties to refrain from steps which will render futile any efforts to find a way back to negotiations and salvage the two-State solution. “Both sides have to convince each other anew they are partners for peace. If Israel is serious about the two-State solution, it must recognize the negative impact of continued illegal settlement activity. Palestinians in turn should be reflective of their actions in international fora.”

Moreover, he said that the international community and the region should also reassess its role if they remain convinced of the importance of the two-State solution, and ask what the world can do to persuade the parties to make the right choice.

“This can no longer be ‘business as usual.’ Unrealistic and prescriptive timelines may be counterproductive, as can rushing the parties back to the table without having the necessary framework in place,” he said, expressing his belief that the “current moment of reflection” must be devoted to discussion on a substantive basis for an early resumption of talks, building on the US effort of the past nine months and relying on continued US engagement.

FEATURE: Music at UN event teaches about the Holocaust through victims’ experiences

29 April - From Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 until the 1945 liberation, music played an integral role in daily life under Nazism, as illustrated at a United Nations event which used the medium of the arts to communicate fragments of the lives of victims of the Holocaust.

It gives us a deep, nuanced and complicated sense of who were these human beings who experienced these terrible things and how did they respond, said music scholar Shirli Gilbert about music that survived the Holocaust.

And see them not as a faceless mass of six million people but as individuals who came from different places, from different backgrounds, and understood what was happening in different ways.

Working in partnership with Clive Marks, who spent most of his life studying European history and music, and who was awarded the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II in 2005 for his philanthropic efforts, Ms. Gilbert created an on-line resource for music associated with and played during the Holocaust. The website is part of the Organisation for Rehabilitation through Training (World ORT).

In his second symphony, Arthur Honegger writes about the streets of Paris during the German occupation the streets on a wet Sunday afternoon, and you actually feel that you can see the greyness of it all, Mr. Marks said in an interview alongside Ms. Gilbert ahead of the special event, Learning about the Holocaust through the Arts. Organized by the Holocaust and the UN Outreach Programme, the event was held in partnership with the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations and the World Jewish Congress.
Written for strings in 1946, this symphony features a trumpet solo which plays a chorale tune by Johann Sebastian Bach. Its the most glorious ending of any symphony that I know, Mr. Marks said.

The symphony, as Mr. Marks explains based on information of which he has some gaps, was flown by partisans to England, where someone brought it to the BBC, and which was ultimately played for the first time publicly by a doctor who had a string orchestra.

Although that is one of his favorites, a piece which more appropriately commemorates the Holocaust, Mr. Marks noted, is Arnold Schenbergs 1946 A Survivor from Warsaw, a seven-minute piece work for a narrator, mens chorus and orchestra which describes the German Third Reich shooting prisoners who sing the Jewish prayer Shema Yisroel.

Looking for the music is quite difficult, both scholars agree. Among her most exciting finds, Ms. Gilbert recounted rifling through a filing cabinet in an archival office of the former site Sachsenhausen concentration camp which had been in what was then East Germany.

I found 16 original song books that had been written by prisoners and presumably hidden beneath their beds with hundreds of songs and illustrations that they had used in camp sing-alongs, she said, adding that playing the songs, or any of the music, is a way of bringing to life again an original artefact from that time.

They really are portraits of a community, a diverse set of individuals representing different political affiliations, different ages, different religious, homosexuals, lots of other groups, she said. There are so many songs that will talk about how people feel about [those] holding power over them, how they feel about explaining whats happening to their children, how they remember their past and how they try to create a sense of community.

The goal of their project, which also includes anthems, jazz under the Nazis, Yiddish tango songs, theatre songs, among others, is to share the music with a wider audience and to engage young people in learning about the Holocaust, Ms. Gilbert said.

[The Holocaust] was so powerful that no one should ever be allowed to forget it, Mr. Marks noted. Young people have to be encouraged to understand history. What happened during the Holocaust affects the whole of Central European history.

Mr. Marks said he would like to learn more about music in other parts of the world, such as in Afghanistan and the harassment of women or anyone else who sings even at home privately.

Music seems to be a very dangerous subject, and can be a very dangerous subject, depending how its used for propaganda, marching songs, as a warning that something terrible is going to happen ta ta ta ta, he said humming the beginning of Beethovens Fifth Symphony, which although written in the 19th century, became a symbol for the Allied Forces.

Music is a call to action, something which can be used to soothe, bring back happier memories, to calm people down and to rouse them as well, he said, adding with a laugh: A good German marching song certainly gets me going.

Opening the event at UN Headquarters in New York, Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, stressed that incorporating the arts helps to further personalize the stories of the Holocaust.

The arts help to highlight the impact that this tragedy has had on the individual and the community as a result of hatred, bigotry and ignorance, he noted.

An Austrian national, Mr. Launsky-Tieffenthal told a personal story of an Austrian-Jewish artist who taught children in concentration camps how to draw, among them Petr Ginz, who was killed at the age of 16 in Auschwitz-Birkenau, one of the worst German Nazi concentration and extermination camps. Petrs story features in a recently published study guide by the Holocaust and the UN Outreach Programme.

The seed of a creative idea does not die in the mud and scum. Even there it will germinate and spread its blossom like a star
shining in darkness, Mr. Launsky-Tieffenthal said quoting Petr.

Hosting the event which included representatives from more than 30 universities, including The Juilliard School, the manager of the Holocaust and the UN Outreach Programme, Kimberly Mann, said that the arts stimulate your mind and engage you to action.

Also participating in the event, Naomi Warren, who was born on 1 September 1920, and whose story of survival in Auschwitz-Birkenau inspired the Light / The Holocaust and Humanity Project at the Ballet Austin.

We just bound together. It was so important not to be alone, she said. When you are not satisfied with what you have and not knowing what is going to happen tomorrow it is just so, so hard to continue, but still there is maybe a little hope left.

In 1945 British army liberated the camp. To describe your heart, to describe your mind, now you are free and you have really survived, its a miracle, Ms. Warren continued. You build on your past but you look forward to your future.

She spoke alongside Artistic Director, Stephen Mills, who worked a decade on the dance project which he described as very personal sharing between the audience and the dancer.

How do you make a dance that is reflexive as catastrophic as the Holocaust? he quipped. There is no way to make an artistic representation, to quantify the suffering. Its an educational component. The goal is to educate with the dance being one strategy.

The event also featured literature, including a reading by Academy-award winning actress Olympia Dukakis and Nava Semel, an award-winning Israeli author and playwright; and a presentation about film by Olga Gershenson, a scholar on Holocaust cinema.

The anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau January 27 has been designed by the UN General Assembly as International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

**Security Council lifts Côte d’Ivoire’s rough diamond ban, tweaks arms embargo**

In a resolution adopted at UN Headquarters in New York, the Council extended until 30 April 2015 sanctions first put in place in 2004 against “the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer to the West African nation, from their territories or by their nationals, or using their flag vessels or aircraft, of arms and any related material.”

Supplies of non-lethal equipment which would enable the Ivorian security forces to use “appropriate and proportionate force while maintaining public order” would no longer require notification to the Sanctions Committee. Nor would any technical assistance, training or financial assistance used for the same purpose.

Supplies of heavy weapons will still require advance approval by the Sanctions Committee, while shipment of small calibre lethal equipment simply requires Côte d’Ivoire to notify the Committee.

The Council decided to continue financial and travel measures in place until 30 April 2015.
The changes are the result of a review of the embargo in light of progress made in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of combatants as well as security sector reform (SSR), national reconciliation and the fight against impunity.

The 15-member Council also unanimously agreed to terminate sanctions imposed in 2005 on diamond imports from Côte d’Ivoire. The decision was made “in light of progress made towards the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) implementation and better governance of the sector.”

The Kimberley Process, established by the UN General Assembly in 2003, aims to prevent so-called “conflict diamonds” from entering the mainstream.

The resolution also requests Côte d’Ivoire to update the Sanctions Committee on its progress in implementing its action plan to develop its diamond sector, including enforcement of illegal smuggling and reporting from financial flows of diamonds.

**Security Council extends UN Western Sahara mission through April 2015**

**29 April** - The Security Council today extended for another year the mandate of the United Nations mission tasked with monitoring the ceasefire in Western Sahara and organizing a referendum on self-determination for the people of the territory.

The UN has been involved in efforts to find a settlement in Western Sahara since 1976, when fighting broke out between Morocco and the Frente Polisario after the Spanish colonial administration of the territory ended.

In today’s resolution, the 15-member Council extended the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 30 April 2015. MINURSO has been in effect since 1991.

Today’s resolution urges Member States to provide voluntary contributions to fund “confidence-building measures agreed upon between the parties” including visits between separated family members.

Earlier this month, the United Nations refugee agency announced that, following months of suspension, family flights between Sahrawi refugees living in camps near Tindouf, Algeria, and their relatives in the territory of Western Sahara had resumed. Nearly 20,000 people have taken part in family visits since the programme began in 2004.

The renewed mandate also supports Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s request for an additional 15 UN military observers, within existing resources.

As in previous mandates, the Security Council encourages the parties to continue their efforts to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights in Western Sahara and the Tindouf camps refugee camps in Algeria. Members this year added additional language to these efforts to include “the freedoms of expression and association.”

The Council also welcomed recent steps and initiatives taken by Morocco to strengthen the National Council on Human Rights Commissions, and the Government’s continued interaction Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.

Members also noted that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is planning a visit to Western Sahara this year.

The Council discussed the situation in Western Sahara on 17 April when the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of MINURSO, Wolfgang Weisbrod-Weber, as well as the Secretary General’s Personal Envoy to Western Sahara, Christopher Ross, briefed members in closed-door consultations.
Maldives should repeal new regulation providing for death penalty, says UN rights office

29 April - The United Nations human rights office today voiced deep concern about a new regulation in the Maldives that effectively overturns a 60-year moratorium on the use of capital punishment in the country and allows for children as young as seven to be sentenced to death for certain crimes.

“We urge the Government to retain its moratorium on the use of the death penalty in all circumstances, particularly in cases that involve juvenile offenders and to work towards abolishing the practice altogether,” said Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“We equally encourage the Government to repeal the new regulations and other provisions that provide for the death penalty,” she told reporters in Geneva.

Adopted on 27 April, the new regulation provides for the use of the death penalty for the offence of intentional murder, including when committed by individuals under the age of 18. The age of criminal responsibility in the Maldives is 10, but for hadd offences, children as young as 7 years old can be held responsible. Hadd offences include theft, fornication, adultery, consumption of alcohol, and apostasy.

Ms. Shamdasani noted that the new regulation means that children as young as 7 can now be sentenced to death.

“According to the new regulation, minors convicted of intentional murder shall be executed once they turn 18. Similar provisions in the recently ratified Penal Code, allowing for the application of the death penalty for crimes committed when below the age of 18, are also deeply regrettable,” she said.

Under international law, those who are charged and convicted for offences they have committed while they were under 18 years of age should not be sentenced to death or life imprisonment without possibility of release, the spokesperson added.

Further, international human rights treaties, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Maldives has ratified, impose an absolute ban on the death sentence against persons below the age of 18 at the time when the offence was committed.

South Sudan: UN brings aid to displaced civilians ahead of rains; calls for month-long truce

29 April - The United Nations refugee agency is preparing to airlift relief supplies to South Sudan today for 100,000 displaced people ahead of the rainy season, while the top UN relief official there is calling for a month-long truce to enable people to move around safely and cultivate their fields.

The blankets, sleeping mats, water buckets and other relief items being transported from Dubai to the South Sudanese capital of Juba will be distributed mainly in Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei states, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

“Once the rainy season begins in earnest next month, roads in these areas will become impassable for weeks,” UNHCR spokesperson Fatoumata Lejeune told reporters in Geneva.

The operation is part of a wider effort by the agency to supply essential relief for many of the more than one million people displaced by the fighting in South Sudan over the last four months.

Within South Sudan, UNHCR is concerned about terrified civilians who have been left without basic household items.
because they have been forced to flee violence, often more than once. This leaves them exposed to the elements without the ability to keep warm, cook or maintain basic standards of hygiene.

Fighting has continued to take place in various parts of the country despite the signing of a cessation of hostilities agreement by the main parties to the conflict in January.

In total, 923,000 South Sudanese are displaced within their own country, while more than 293,000 people have become refugees in neighbouring countries since the crisis began in mid-December 2013. Some 4.9 million people need humanitarian assistance.

Meanwhile, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in South Sudan Toby Lanzer warned today that the conflict has put a “staggering” 7 million people at risk of food insecurity across the country.

“I call on all parties to the conflict in South Sudan to observe one month of tranquility this May; to stop the violence and to provide a safe environment for civilians caught by the conflict at this most crucial time of the year,” he said in a statement.

“The citizens of South Sudan have a right to move around their country whether to tend to their livestock or for other reasons, or even to seek asylum in neighbouring countries if they so wish. The conflict currently compromises their ability to do so,” said Mr. Lanzer.

“While the only way to reverse this crisis and its grave humanitarian consequences is to find a political resolution to the conflict, one month of tranquility this May is a tangible step that will have an immediate impact on the lives of millions of people.”

**UN human rights chief deplores Egypt’s ‘outrageous’ mass death sentences**

29 April - The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights today strongly condemned the imposition of the death penalty on hundreds of people in Egypt, after mass trials that she said clearly breached international human rights law.

“It is outrageous that for the second time in two months, the Sixth Chamber of the Criminal Court in Al-Minya has imposed the death sentence on huge groups of defendants after perfunctory trials,” High Commissioner Navi Pillay said in remarks read out by her spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani in Geneva.

According to information received, some of the 683 defendants sentenced yesterday were charged with killing a policeman and breaking into the Edwa police station in Al-Minya on 14 August 2013.

This legal decision follows the 24 March conviction of 529 defendants on charges that include membership in an unlawful organization (the Muslim Brotherhood), incitement to violence, vandalism, unlawful gathering and the killing of one police officer. All the charges relate to events in August 2013 after the Government of President Mohamed Morsi was ousted.

As in the previous cases, the exact charges against each defendant are not clear, given that they were not individually read out in court.

Ms. Pillay lashed out at the verdicts made “at the hands of a judicial system where international fair trial guarantees appear to be increasingly trampled upon.”

She noted that Egypt has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and said that “it is high time that Egypt takes its human rights commitments seriously.”

In a news release from her Office (OHCHR), Ms. Pillay stressed that the death penalty can only be applied for the most
serious crimes and after the most stringent trial safeguards.

“This has clearly not been the case in these two trials before the Al-Minya criminal court. A mass trial of hundreds of people, rife with procedural irregularities is simply not good enough for imposition of the death penalty,” she reiterated.

**Upcoming national elections ‘important milestone’ for Iraq, Ban says ahead of polls**

29 April - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has highlighted the importance of Wednesday’s national elections for peace and stability in Iraq and called for creating the necessary conditions to enable all citizens to participate in the polls.

Tomorrow Iraqis will cast their ballots for the Council of Representatives, or legislature, in what will be the country’s third national election under the 2005 Constitution. On the same day, voters in the Kurdistan Region will also choose their Governorate Council representatives.

“These elections mark an important milestone in Iraq’s democratic transition and can contribute to greater peace and stability in the country,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson.

The Secretary-General welcomed the progress made by the Independent High Electoral Commission in holding these elections on time and in line with national commitments and international standards.

In addition, he strongly condemned the wave of violence and terrorist attacks that has targeted political leaders, candidates and electoral staff ahead of the elections and conveyed his deepest condolences to the families of those affected.

“He urges all political leaders and personalities to create the conditions necessary to enable all Iraqi men and women to participate in the electoral process and to have their say on the future of their country,” the statement added.

**Honouring victims, UN urges full ratification of Chemical Weapons Convention**

29 April - Marking the Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and General Assembly President John Ashe today urged the six reticent Member States to sign and/or ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention which aims to eliminate an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

“Until membership is universal and the last stockpiles of chemical weapons are destroyed, our work will not be done,” Mr. Ban said in reference to Angola, Egypt, Israel, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Myanmar and South Sudan.

Mr. Ashe echoed Mr. Ban’s tribute to the victims, adding that chemical weapons “have no place in our world.”

He added that the international community’s commitment to eliminating the threat of chemical weapons strengthens one of the core missions of the UN: the promotion of peace, security and stability worldwide.

Observed annually on 29 April, the Day commemorates the date in 1997 on which the Convention entered into force. The treaty prohibits the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer or use of chemical weapons by States parties.

Seeing first-hand the “horrific use” of chemical weapons in Syria in 2013, Mr. Ban called their use “a deplorable offense
against humanity.”

This year’s observance comes just days after the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the UN announced that 92.5 per cent of Syria’s chemical weapons programme has been either removed or destroyed.

“The multinational effort to rid Syria of its chemical weapons programme shows what can be done when the international community comes together,” Mr. Ban said.

In the past year, Syria and Somalia joined the Convention, raising its membership to 190 States.