Fleeing conflicts, record numbers of migrants and refugees crossed Mediterranean so far in 2015 – UN

1 July - War, conflict or persecution forced most of the 137,000 desperate people who made the perilous journey to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe during the first six months of 2015, making this primarily a refugee crisis, a new report from the United Nations refugee agency said today.

The opening lines of the The sea route to Europe: The Mediterranean passage in the age of refugees, compiled by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, put the challenges facing Europe, the wider international community and humanitarian actors in stark relief.

“Europe is living through a maritime refugee crisis of historic proportions. Its evolving response has become one of the continent's defining challenges of the early 21st century, with long-lasting implications for humanitarian practice, regional stability and international public opinion,” it says, also revealing that the first half of the year saw an increase of 83 per cent of such crossings compared to the same period last year.

“As Europe debates the best way to deal with the rising crisis on the Mediterranean, we must be clear: most of the people arriving by sea in Europe are refugees, seeking protection from war and persecution,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres in a press release on the launch of the report.

One third of the men, women and children who arrived by sea in Italy or Greece were from Syria, whose nationals are almost universally deemed to qualify for refugee status or other forms of protection, the report explains. The second and
third most common countries of origin are Afghanistan and Eritrea, whose nationals are also mostly considered to qualify for refugee status.

“Data received from Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain charts an 83 per cent increase in refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean from January to June compared to the same period last year. Historically, crossings significantly increase in the second half of the year, in particular over the summer months, so it is expected the numbers will continue to soar. Arrivals in the second half of 2014, for example, were almost double those of the first half,” warns Mr. Gutteres.

The number of deaths at sea rose to record levels in April 2015, and then dropped dramatically in May and June. Between January and March, 479 refugees and migrants drowned or went missing, as opposed to 15 during the first three months of the year before. In April the situation took an even more terrible turn. In a number of concurrent wrecks, an unprecedented 1,308 refugees and migrants drowned or went missing in a single month, the report emphasizes.

“The decline in people drowning over the past two months [May and June] is encouraging; a sign that with the right policy, backed by an effective operational response, it is possible to save more lives at sea,” acknowledged Mr. Guterres.

“Nonetheless, we must stay vigilant. For the thousands of refugees and migrants who continue to cross the Mediterranean every week, the risks remain very real.” The report shows that the eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey into Greece has now surpassed the central Mediterranean route (from North Africa to Italy) as the main source of maritime arrivals.

“Europe has a clear responsibility to help those seeking protection from war and persecution,” said Guterres. “To deny that responsibility is to threaten the very building blocks of the humanitarian system Europe worked so hard to build. European countries must shoulder their fair share in responding to the refugee crisis, at home and abroad”, said Mr. Gutteres.

UN Ebola response mission flags importance of staying vigilant as virus resurfaces in Liberia

1 July - The World Health Organization (WHO) today reported that Ebola had resurfaced in Liberia after a teenager who died earlier this week tested positive for the disease in the West African country that had been declared free of Ebola transmission just two months ago.

Liberia has to wait for the incubation period of 42 days without new cases of transmission of the virus to confirm it was again free from Ebola, according to WHO.

“The re-emergence of Ebola in Liberia shows importance of staying vigilant. We must stay focused until we reach zero cases,” said the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER). “The Ebola outbreak in West Africa is not over. We must stay engaged until the job is done.”

WHO, in its weekly update on Ebola, reported that on 29 June, routine surveillance detected a confirmed case of Ebola in Margibi County, Liberia – the first new confirmed case in the country since 20 March.

The case is a 17-year-old male who first became ill on 21 June, the update said. After presenting at a local health facility the patient was treated for malaria and discharged. He died on 28 June and received a safe burial the same day. An oral swab taken before the burial subsequently tested positive twice for EVD [Ebola virus disease].

So far, 102 contacts have been identified, although that number is expected to increase as investigations continue, WHO said.

“At this stage the origin of infection is not known,” according to WHO. “The case reportedly had no recent history of travel, contact with visitors from affected areas, or funeral attendance.”

WHO said there were 20 confirmed cases of Ebola reported in the week to 28 June, the same as the previous week,
including two new health worker infections in Boke, Guinea, bordering Guinea-Bissau.

To date, there have been a total of 27,514 reported cases of Ebola in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone with 11,220 reported deaths, the UN health agency reported.

**Recalling 'responsibility to protect' UN pays tribute to victims of Srebrenica genocide**

1 July - During a high-level commemorative event in New York, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today paid tribute to the victims of the Srebrenica genocide, perpetrated 20 years ago, and which, he said, “will forever weigh on the collective conscience of the international community.”

“We are here to remember the thousands who lost their lives in the genocide…We are here to tell the families and friends of the victims that we share their sorrow. May their souls rest in peace, said Mr. Ban in his remarks to the special event, which honours the 8,000 men and boys who were killed by Bosnian Serb forces who overran Srebrenica – the largest such massacre on European soil since the founding of the United Nations.

Organized by the Preparatory Committee for the Commemoration of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, which is made of 17 UN Member States, as well as the Permanent Mission to the UN of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ceremony, was also attended by Sam Kutesa, President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Ban said that the United Nations, “which was founded to prevent such crimes from recurring”, “failed in its responsibilities” to protect the lives of innocent civilians seeking protection from the conflict and violence around them. The UN Secretariat, the Security Council and Member States share the blame, he emphasized.

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“Here today, I again extend my deepest sympathies to the families of the victims. I renew my pledge to work harder and harder, every single day, to safeguard people everywhere from assaults on their dignity and security,” the Secretary-General stressed.

Saying that it was his duty to pay his respects in person, he reminded the gathering that he had visited Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2012, and had returned with the image of “endless rows of tombstones…etched in my mind.”

At the same time, while there, he also witnessed “how far” Bosnia and Herzegovina has come since the “dark days” of Srebrenica.

“I learned about the ways the country's varied communities are striving to build bridges, increase trust and lay the groundwork for full reconciliation. It takes a long time to heal such deep wounds, and the United Nations remains strongly committed to supporting these efforts. To build a common future, the past has to be frankly addressed and assessed,” he advised.

In the two decades since the genocide, the UN had taken many steps to fulfil this fundamental obligation “to learn from the massacre”, by strengthening its work for prevention, Mr. Ban continued.

Hi Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect provide early warning and work closely with UN Member States to build their capacity to protect people from atrocity crimes, while his Special Advisers on Sexual Violence in Armed conflict and on Children in Armed Conflict are also making important contributions, he pointed out.

“‘The Human Rights Up Front initiative aims to identify the risks of serious violations before situations escalate and the mandates of peacekeeping operations now consistently include authorization to use all necessary means to protect civilians.’

Flagging the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide an “important international
instrument”, the Assembly President Sam Kutesa called upon Member States that had not yet ratified or acceded to it to do so.

He said that it is of critical importance that the international community, particularly the United Nations, is equipped to recognize early warning signs, in order to detect and deter situations that could result in genocide of other gross violations of human rights.

Praising the role of the Secretary-General's Special Advisers in this regard, Mr. Kutesa said that another vital component “of our efforts must be to ensure those responsible for mass killings or genocide are held accountable, and that victims are afforded justice. We must make every effort to ensure justice, while also rebuilding trust and fostering reconciliation following such terrible crimes.”

The Secretary-General also observed that the UN is promoting “truth-seeking” while upholding the principle of individual criminal accountability through the work of fact-finding and commissions of inquiry and the International Criminal Court, tribunals and other judicial bodies.

“The perpetrators of such heinous crimes must not enjoy impunity,” Mr. Ban said.

Saying that more can always be done, he acknowledged that the international community is still failing too many people in desperate need, from Syria to South Sudan, with “unspeakable” levels of violence and terror.

“We must stand together against those who incite and divide – and those guilty of repression and misrule. Let us not turn our backs when people turn to us for help. This should be our promise to the victims of Srebrenica: to make right what was done wrong. A responsibility which falls on all of us,” the UN chief stated in conclusion.

UN rights chief urges concerted action to tackle Boko Haram's 'extensive and far-reaching' abuses

1 July - Describing a pattern of vicious and indiscriminate attacks by Boko Haram in north-east Nigeria that stretched back years, the United Nations human rights chief today urged the international community to help the subregion begin to repair the damage, and specifically appealed to Nigerian authorities to ease abortion restrictions for women and girls who had been sexually enslaved, raped and forced into so-called "marriages" by Boko Haram fighters.

In a briefing to the UN Human Rights Council, on Boko Haram's rights violations and abuses, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein discussed the findings to date by a 12-member team he dispatched to the Far North Region of Cameroon, southern Niger and the north-eastern regions of Nigeria. The team plans to visit Chad next, and a full written report, he said, would be presented to the Council in September.

“However, it has already become clear that the violations committed by Boko Haram are extensive and far-reaching, demanding a response of commensurate magnitude,” Mr. Zeid said.

“Survivors in Nigeria have given my staff distressing witness accounts of gruesome mass killings of men and boys whom Boko Haram grouped together and gunned down or hacked to death with sadistic cruelty, before the female inhabitants of villages were abducted,” he said.

In addition, “interviews have also confirmed that during their captivity – lasting in many cases for months or even years – women and girls have been sexually enslaved, raped and forced into so-called ‘marriages’”. Many survivors of these horrific experiences are now pregnant by their rapists,” he said.

He opened his remarks by telling the Council that it is encouraging to see governmental control being re-established over key areas of Nigeria. “These improvements in the immediate security situation give us hope for peace, and that the
authorities will be able to address the root causes of this crisis,” he added.

The High Commissioner then focused on concerns about the plight of adults and children who had been freed from captivity by Boko Haram.

“I’m dismayed by reports that adults, and even children, who have been held captive and even enslaved by Boko Haram for months – and who have been delivered from captivity by government forces – are being subjected to detention, sometimes for lengthy periods, without charges,” he said.

“The case of 84 children from what was initially said to be a Boko Haram training camp in Girvidig, in Cameroon, has been a particularly shocking example,” he said. “These boys, aged between 7 and 15, were apprehended by the security forces in December 2014, and were sent for evaluation.”

“Only last Friday – after six months of detention in near-starvation conditions – were some 30 of these children released to their families,” he said and urged the authorities to resolve the situations of the remaining boys as swiftly as possible.

The High Commissioner also drew attention to the situation of many formerly captive women and young girls who are pregnant and their reported wish to terminate these unwanted pregnancies.

“I note that abortion is legal in Nigeria only when the life of the woman is at risk,” he said. “Human rights mechanisms have consistently called for ensuring access to safe abortion services beyond the protection of the woman's life, including in cases of rape and to preserve the health of the woman.”

“Taking this into account, I strongly urge the most compassionate possible interpretation of the current regulations in Nigeria, to include the risk of suicide and risks to mental health for women and young girls who have suffered such appalling cruelty,” he said.

He also insisted on the need for greater attention to human rights by both the military and the police forces in concerned countries when carrying out security operations against Boko Haram.

“Protection of civilians must be a paramount concern in all military operations, with respect for the strict rules of engagement that protect human rights and international humanitarian law,” he said.

The High Commissioner also said that “Member States, donors and the UN Country Teams can and should begin focusing programmes to meet the needs of the people of the sub-region – to repair the damage caused by Boko Haram, and to ensure that such a movement can never again take hold,” Mr. Zeid concluded.

FEATURE: The UN body with its finger on the pulse of sustainable development

1 July - It was 2009, at the height of the financial crisis, and world leaders were struggling to understand how they had been so taken by surprise by an economic shock that had struck their populations with the ferocity and suddenness of a natural disaster.

They were seeking answers to the questions raised by this global economic catastrophe in the United Nations, asking Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon what insights he and the Organization could offer on the impact of the crisis in the many countries where the UN operates.

The speed with which the global economy had been swallowed by the crisis exposed the gaps in governments’ knowledge and understanding of their peoples and revealed the absence of up-to-the-minute, accurate data about who was being affected and to what degree.
All they had were three- to five-year-old household surveys, censuses and other national statistical collections, which could only provide limited guidance on how to respond to the suddenly devastated global economic landscape.

After consulting with UN agencies, Mr. Ban was forced to come to a similar conclusion. The UN had nothing on the scale necessary to close the information gap and to equip governments with data that was updating fast enough to inform effective responses to the sorts of situations they were facing on the ground.

What emerged was *UN Global Pulse*, a body within the Secretary-General’s office dedicated to tracking development progress and emerging vulnerabilities in real-time by tapping into Big Data – the enormous volumes of records that are automatically created by people’s every interaction with the digital world.

Robert Kirkpatrick, the Director of *UN Global Pulse*, says Big Data is aptly named, as the volumes are mind-bogglingly huge and continue growing exponentially.

“The amount of information being produced is more than doubling every year,” he says. “In 2014 alone, there was more data produced than in all of history combined.”

The vast majority of that data is held by private sector firms, like telecommunications providers, banks and credit card issuers, and social media companies.

Robert Kirkpatrick, Director of UN Global Pulse, talks to the UN News Centre about harnessing the power of Big Data. Credit: United Nations

Every time a credit card is swiped, data is created. Every time a mobile phone call is made, a text sent or airtime added, data is created. Every time a status is posted, a ‘check-in’ made or someone’s post ‘liked,’ data is created. The firms then gather this ‘data exhaust’ and analyze the information contained within to support business decision-making.

“Information out there is being used to commercial advantage by these companies,” says Mr. Kirkpatrick. “So they can identify new customers; so they can identify new market trends. They can monitor their own operations in real-time. What hasn’t been done with this data, systematically, to date, is learning how to use it as a public good.”

As well as equipping governments and the UN to respond better to economic disasters like the 2008-9 meltdown, the designation of Global Pulse also contained within it recognition of the fact that achieving the new development agenda would require 21st Century techniques and approaches.

“Everyone has recognized that to achieve sustainable development, we’re going to need to move beyond traditional approaches of using surveys once or twice a year to monitor what’s happening in communities where development work is underway,” says Mr. Kirkpatrick.

“What we see now is that the bulk of the information out there that is relevant to global development is actually being produced by the beneficiaries themselves, not being collected by national statistics offices. So the opportunity here is to use this kind of information both to measure sustainable development in ways not done before but also to achieve it.”

Global Pulse is one of the world’s most innovative responses to the challenge, seeking to harness the power of Big Data to provide immediate and constantly updated insights on issues such as health, education, employment and food security, to support global development and humanitarian action.

In pursuit of that, Global Pulse has established a network of ‘Innovation Labs’ in New York, Kampala and Jakarta, which seek to partner with UN agencies and governments and to experiment with new sources of Big Data to find out how they can be used to close information gaps – either by providing totally new insights or producing information that is already known but in a faster or cheaper way.

Typically, a UN agency will tell the nearest Pulse Lab what problem they are trying to solve and what type of information they need to be able to do so. Global Pulse then brings to bear its network of partners in the private sector and academia,
who offer the data and human expertise needed to complete the work.

Once a methodology is in place for estimating an aspect of development through application of Big Data, the Lab can then turn that methodology into an application that can be used by the UN agency on a daily or a weekly basis to better understand how, where and why their development programmes are making a difference or to understand how quickly a population is recovering from a natural disaster.

“The data sources that are useful for development fall into two broad categories: what people say and what they do,” says Mr. Kirkpatrick. “How people spend money on global air-time products predicts how much they’re spending on food and predicts their overall level of poverty. How people move about a city, which you can see through mobile phone networks, predicts how they’re being displaced by a natural disaster. How people tweet the price of food predicts the actual food prices.”

When talking about “what people say,” Mr. Kirkpatrick is referring to information readily available online in digital form publicly – for example on Twitter or Facebook. That information can be analyzed readily to understand what people think and what they feel and how that is changing over time.

The information on “what people do” meanwhile is much less subjective than the information found on social media and is in fact extremely precise because it is produced as a by-product of people’s use of digital services. Some of the results of such studies can be incredibly revealing.

In one project, Global Pulse partnered with the World Food Programme (WFP) in central Africa. Global Pulse was given access to tens of millions of anonymous telephone records which revealed how people spend money on air-time purchases in the country.

The air-time spending patterns were compared to 7,000 WFP household surveys, which measured their consumption of food and placed them in the multidimensional poverty index.

“What we found was astounding,” says Mr. Kirkpatrick. “How people spend money on mobile air-time is an incredibly powerful predictor of their poverty level. WFP does these kinds of surveys every two, three, four years. A mobile network – just as a by-product of providing services to these populations – is producing every second the means to generate an updated understanding of their economic well-being.”

The information gathered from air-time purchase data, because it correlates so closely with information known from surveys and the poverty index provides what Mr. Kirkpatrick calls a “proxy measure” for poverty. The close correlation between the information in the various sources provides the government, the UN and development partners with a real-time technique for tracking poverty.

“That, we believe, has profound implications,” says Mr. Kirkpatrick. “This type of information can be used for policy planning. Unexplained drops in spending patterns on air-time indicate that people also don’t have enough money for food and medicines and education. That means that we now have an early warning system that can be used for much more precise and rapid targeting of response.”

Transforming Big Data into a genuine public good first and foremost requires ensuring a "do no harm approach" – privacy must be protected at every step. To that end, the Global Pulse initiative has a strong focus on data privacy and protection, and works only with data-sets containing no personally identifiable information, per its Data Privacy Principles. Global Pulse also advocates for richer public dialogue and discourse about data privacy in the context of sustainable development, through conducting research on the topic, assembling a global Data Privacy Advisory Group and convening public events.

While some companies remain hesitant about sharing the their data – mainly because of concerns over giving away competitive advantage or because of fears about invasion of privacy – there are also difficulties associated with bringing together practitioners from diverse and otherwise unconnected fields to work on Global Pulse’s projects.

“One of the main challenges that this whole area faces is getting everyone together to do the work,” he says. “Getting
together the data science expertise and the development expertise. These communities have not historically been connected to each other and that’s one of the main functions of our Pulse Labs.”

He says Global Pulse has been working with the private sector on an idea called ‘Data Philanthropy,’ whereby their data can be safely and responsibly used in the cause of sustainable development. As a UN body, Global Pulse has found it has some unique advantages in that realm.

“The UN is in a neutral space between governments, communities and the private sector and we’re able to use our labs as a safe space for innovation,” he says. “I think that’s a really important role for Global Pulse – creating that sandbox where they try new things and learn very quickly what avenues we should be following.”

Attention on the field is certainly growing, particularly in light of the Secretary-General’s Independent Expert Advisory Group’s report on the data revolution for sustainable development, called ‘A World That Counts.’ Within the private and public sectors, as well as in civil society, there is now tremendous interest in how new technologies and approaches can transform development and humanitarian operations and ensure the inclusion of all in development processes.

“Big Data is a new digital natural resource and it has tremendous potential to be used to achieve sustainable development and to measure progress,” says Mr. Kirkpatrick. “Data is now an exciting topic in a way that it wasn’t before. And we are very keen to build on that momentum.”

First-ever heatwave warning guidelines issued by UN as global temperatures soar

1 July - Two United Nations agencies have unveiled a series of new guidelines aimed at addressing the health risks posed by the increasing number and intensity of climate change-related heatwaves affecting the planet, as warm weather alerts spread across Europe following soaring temperatures that killed hundreds of people in India and Pakistan last month.

The set of guidelines, jointly produced by the UN World Health Organization (WHO) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and entitled Heatwaves and Health: Guidance on Warning-System Development, will seek to alert decision-makers, health services and the general public through the systematic development of so-called heatwave early warning systems which, in turn, will hope to trigger timely action in reducing the effects of hot-weather extremes on health.

“Heatwaves are a dangerous natural hazard, and one that requires increased attention,” said Maxx Dilley, Director of the WMO's Climate Prediction and Adaptation Branch, and Maria Neira, Director of the WHO's Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health, in their foreword to the publication. “They lack the spectacular and sudden violence of other hazards, such as tropical cyclones or flash floods, but the consequences can be severe.”

According to the two agencies, heatwaves are becoming more frequent and intense on a global scale, largely due to the acceleration of climate change. In recent weeks, they have already caused hundreds of deaths across India and Pakistan. Meanwhile, the heatwaves in the northern hemisphere's summer of 2003 were responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people across the European continent.

The publication's launch also follows the WMO's recent revelation that 14 of the 15 hottest years recorded have all been in the 21st century, confirming a dangerous trend in global warming amid devastating weather patterns and increasing temperatures.

The guidance provided by the WHO and WMO takes into consideration a number of factors, including who is most at risk from heat, outlines approaches to assessing heat stress and surveys heat-intervention strategies, all the while building upon the “lessons learned” from the implementation of the first-ever Heat-Health Warning System, rolled out in the United States city of Philadelphia in 1995.
In addition, the authors noted, the WMO-WHO joint publication is expected “to provide effective climate services and save lives in vulnerable communities around the world.”

“Growing concerns over climate change have brought to the fore three important aspects: adaptation, disaster-risk reduction and the need for climate information and services to support these,” Mr. Dilley and Dr. Neira concluded. “Heat-Health Warning Systems bring together these three facets and exemplify an effective demonstration of climate-risk management in practice.”

**Amid funding shortfalls, UN agency to make food aid cuts to Syrian refugees**

**1 July** - A severe lack of funding is forcing the United Nations to implement deeper cuts in food assistance to vulnerable Syrian refugees across Lebanon and Jordan, the Organization has confirmed.

According to a press release issued earlier today, the World Food Programme's (WFP) regional refugee operation remains 81 per cent underfunded and requires an immediate injection of $139 million in order to continue helping “desperate” refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey and Iraq until the end of the summer.

“Just when we thought things couldn't get worse, we are forced yet again to make yet more cuts,” said Muhammed Hadi, WFP Regional Director for the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. “Refugees were already struggling to cope with what little we could provide.”

The WFP explained that since the beginning of 2015 it has sought to prioritize available funds in order to ensure continued assistance to families most in need. The growing limitations on resources, however, have already forced the UN food agency to reduce its range of assistance to 1.6 million Syrian refugees in the five countries.

“We are extremely concerned about the impact these cuts will have on refugees and the countries that host them,” Mr. Hadi continued. “Families are taking extreme measures to cope such as pulling their children out of school, skipping meals and getting into debt to survive. The long-term effects of this could be devastating.”

The four-year Syria conflict has generated a steady outflow of almost 4 million refugees into neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan, burdening those countries' infrastructures and leading to overcrowded settlements where many refugees struggle amid high unemployment and precarious services.

According to the latest data available, Turkey alone is host to 1,772,535 registered Syrian refugees – more than any other in the world – with about 259,000 living in 23 camps set up and managed by the Government.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian impact of the crisis is only further compounded by the grim human toll which, as of today, counts 220,000 people killed and over one million injured since hostilities began.
Ban welcomes restoration of diplomatic ties between Cuba and the United States

1 July - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed today's announcement that Cuba and the United States will reopen their embassies in Havana and Washington, D.C.

“The restoration of diplomatic ties is an important step on the path toward the normalization of relations”, says a statement released by his spokesperson earlier today.

In keeping with the principles of its founding Charter, the United Nations supports efforts to promote more harmonious and good neighbourly relations among States, adds the statement.

“The Secretary-General hopes that this historic step will benefit the peoples of both countries.”

On December 7, 2014, the UN chief welcomed the beginning of normalization of their relations between Cuba and the United States, which put aside decades of hostility.

Media reports said at the time that, as part of a deal negotiated over a period of 18 months, the US would restore full diplomatic relations with Cuba and open an embassy in Havana for the first time in more than 50 years after the release of an American contractor held in prison for five years.

UN urges 'people-centred' approach to migrant and refugees in Southeast Asia

1 July - Several senior United Nations officials today strongly urged Southeast Asian countries to back a “people-centred” approach to migration by, among others, expanding avenues for safe and legal migration, while stepping up law enforcement to put a stop to human trafficking.

Welcoming the convening of an emergency meeting to be held on 2 July by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to address a people-centred approach for tackling the irregular migration in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, the officials called for a comprehensive and durable solution to this issue.

“The meeting provides a timely opportunity to move meaningfully forward on the comprehensive and durable solution … in keeping with the spirit of unity and solidarity of a people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN,” according to a joint statement issued today by the UN High Commissioners for Refugees and for Human Rights, the Director-General the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Special Representative for International Migration and Development, and Executive Director of the UN office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Despite recent progress, some important remaining tasks need to be done such as granting access to national and international agencies to reach refugees and migrants, rather than using immigration detention, noted the joint statement.

“We strongly urge States to undertake sustained efforts to expand avenues for safe and legal migration,” said the statement, adding that those include “for family reunification and labour migration at all skill levels, while stepping up law enforcement.”

The joint statement also called on States to implement UNODC’s recommendation to network ports and border crossings for operations to share information and improve policies with commitments to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.
Stressing that the creation of a continuing mechanism is key to international support for the affected States, the UN officials said such task force should guarantee the rights of all migrants and refugees while addressing the drivers and root causes of the forced movement.

The Emergency ASEAN Ministerial meeting on Transnational Crime: Irregular Movement of Persons in the South East Asia Region will take place on 2 July in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**UN chief condemns latest Egypt terror attack**

1 July - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned today's deadly attack in North Sinai in what appears to be the second bout of terrorism to afflict Egypt in less than a week.

In a statement issued this afternoon by the United Nations spokesperson's office, the Secretary-General deplored the series of attacks committed earlier today in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula resulting in the deaths of over 70 Egyptian soldiers and the injury of many others and conveyed his condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government of Egypt.

“The United Nations stands firm with the people of Egypt in their fight against terrorism,” Mr. Ban's spokesperson added.

Today's attack comes just days after a bombing rattled the Cairo suburb of Heliopolis killing the Egyptian Prosecutor General Hisham Barakat and injuring at least eight others.

According to initial reports, the two incidents do not appear to be related.

**Security Council urges Libyan parties to agree on government of national accord**

1 July - Reiterating that there can be no military solution to the crisis in Libya, the United Nations Security Council today urged the parties to the conflict to agree on a Government of National Accord and sign the proposal presented by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) “in the coming days.”

“The members of the Security Council agreed that commitment to a Government of National Accord is in the interests of the Libyan people and their future, in order to end Libya's political, security and institutional crises, and to confront the rising threat of terrorism,” says a statement to the press, welcoming the meeting of the participants in the Libyan political dialogue in Morocco that took place from June 25 to 28.

The Security Council, adds the statement, recognized the efforts made by all participants in the political dialogue and other tracks of the peace process, including civil society contributions, local-level ceasefires, prisoner exchanges and the return of internally displaced persons.

The members of the Council encouraged UNSMIL to advance relevant efforts for coordination of international assistance to a future Government of National Accord, reiterating their support for the ongoing efforts of Special Representative to the Secretary General Bernardino León.

Recalling its relevant resolutions, the members of the Security Council finally noted that the Sanctions Committee is prepared to sanction “those who threaten Libya's peace, stability and security or that undermine the successful completion of its political transition.”
Ukraine: UN scales up food assistance in country's crisis torn eastern region

1 July - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) said today it will scale up its emergency operation in eastern Ukraine to provide 500,000 conflict-affected people in the region with food assistance until the end of the year.

Saying that it urgently needs for $30.3 million to continue providing aid through December 2015, WFP noted that food distributions in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions or oblasts have almost tripled the number of people the UN agency has been assisting since November 2014.

With its current expansion of aid, WFP will carry out food distributions in the three additional regions of Kharkivska, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhya.

“The ongoing conflict has taken its toll on tens of thousands of people who are in desperate need of help,” said WFP Head of Office in Ukraine, Giancarlo Stopponi. “They are either trapped by the conflict or have fled their homes and are now living in difficult conditions.”

In the new operation phase, WFP will be supporting people in schools, orphanages, hospitals and other institutions in non-government controlled areas. It will also provide supplementary food to prevent and combat malnutrition among children under age two.

Mr. Stopponi stressed: “We are doing everything we can to deliver food assistance to as many people as possible and are particularly concerned about small children, who are most at risk.”

WFP will continue to provide cash and voucher transfers to internally displaced people in government-controlled locations, and food rations to those in non-government controlled areas.

It is estimated that more than 1.3 million people have been displaced in Ukraine since the beginning of the crisis last year.

INTERVIEW: "Climate change is in everybody's backyard" – Robert Redford

1 July - Actor and environmental activist Robert Redford paid his first visit to the United Nations Headquarters in New York this week.

The reason for his visit: to address the UN General Assembly’s High-Level Meeting on Climate Change, which aimed to energize multilateral cooperation on the issue ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris later this year. In the French capital, countries will discuss an agreement intended to succeed to the landmark Kyoto Protocol on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Redford has been heavily involved in environmental issues for decades, renowned for his commitment to it and for speaking out on various issues affecting the environment, in addition to serving as a trustee of the Natural Resources Defense Council, a New York City-based non-profit organization, since 1975.

After his speech to the General Assembly, Mr. Redford spoke with the UN News Centre about his visit, his experience in the environmental movement and his thoughts on the need to fight climate change.
Robert Redford: I’m here because I was asked to come – which was an honour – and also here because I think climate change has moved up the register of issues to be considered, and it’s done that because it’s a current issue and it’s a current danger unless it gets addressed. I thought any voice that could be lent to the effort should be used and so I’m here for that.

UN News Centre: Syria, Central African Republic, Yemen – these are just a few of the pressing concerns on the global agenda. Given so many other urgent topics, how hard is it to get the international community to pay attention to climate change?

Robert Redford: I think you can get them to pay attention if you place climate change where it belongs. It’s usually way down at the bottom. The environment, I’ve experienced over the years, gets little attention compared to other things. But I think because of what’s happened now – change is in the air, you can feel it – we’re in a period of change that’s positive with also some negative. Positive: you see what the Pope said. Positive: you see what happened this week with same-sex marriage; you see what’s happened with [US] Supreme Court decisions.

From my point of view those are all pretty positive things. But what sits behind and on top of all this is the bigger problem that concerns everybody’s health – every country, every nation, every person. They’re all under the umbrella of climate. And because climate change is such a harsh topic with very little time to correct it – there’s been so much damage done over the years to the planet – that if we don’t do something sooner rather than later, then I don’t know what kind of planet we’re going to have to live on.

UN News Centre: No negotiations were due to take place at the meeting you addressed on Monday, so what exactly can the global public expect to come out of this meeting?

Robert Redford: What can they expect? I don’t know. I don’t know what the consensus is here, this is a first time for me so I don’t have any experience knowing how they operate, how they think, how they vote – I can only hope. But I think that because every nation is affected, this issue gets their attention.

UN News Centre: What would it take to get everybody’s attention on this issue?

Robert Redford: Years ago there used to be a saying, they called it “NIMBY,” which is an abbreviation of “Not in My Back Yard.” People would not get interested or focus on anything, particularly if it was a danger, unless it was in their backyard. It was somebody else’s problem – they didn’t have to think about it, or worry about it, or address it. But now climate change is in everybody’s backyard. The question is to make people aware of it, to make people aware not only of the dangers but what the positive move would be, and bring it to their attention that it’s already in their own backyard. Look at the drought in California, the flooding, what’s happened in New York – it’s pretty clear that something is happening.

UN News Centre: The Pope recently spoke out about the dangers of climate change. Yet there are those who say the Pope is not an expert on science… your thoughts?

Robert Redford: Please, that’s insulting. The fact is what he’s saying is so much in need – I salute him, on many fronts, particularly that one because he’s placing it where it belongs, as a moral issue, and therefore there’s a spiritual component to that. And thank God that he’s placing it that way.

It’s not about politics. The moral issue of climate change should transcend politics. If it’s reduced to politics, we’re going to have the same old yin-yang, the same old problems, the same old fighting, the same old narrow-minded bickering between ideologies. It’s going to be a mess. Let’s get above it and take advantage of change and make it positive.

UN News Centre: One of the General Assembly speakers was a teenage activist who later said that adults are having a party with the environment and the next generation are stuck with cleaning it up. What are you views on that and the role of youth in climate change?

Robert Redford: I would start with an apology to the new generation. The new generation – focusing on the role of women and politics, focusing on youth – to me I see that as an enormous plus, whereas maybe 15 years ago, no, because I think America’s youth was focused more on other issues, like how to get ahead, how to make money, and the environment was
not on their minds.

But now it is. I’m very encouraged by this new generation. They’re better informed, they’re more knowledgeable, and the more knowledgeable they are, the more they get concerned, because it’s going to be their future. Our time is kind of done. We should apologize for what’s being left for them to work with – they don’t have a lot.

But I’m looking forward to them taking the reins because not only do they deserve it, but I think it’s time, and also I think it’s a good time because the new generation is just different than before. It’s more active. I think it has the quality and the qualifications to take the reins and move things forward with what little we have left of our planet. I’m just sorry we didn’t leave them much.

UN News Centre: You have been involved in the environmental movement for decades. What first got you involved?

Robert Redford: I think if you ran it all the way back, it started when I was a kid growing up in Los Angeles. When I was a child, my memories really began at the end of the Second World War. It was a beautiful city, the air was fresh, it was clean, there were green spaces in between communities. I had a paper route on a bicycle. I rode around different neighbourhoods, it was fresh and clean. I loved it.

Then suddenly, when the war ended, everything changed. It’s like Los Angeles became something at the end of a rainbow and everybody clamoured to get in there. And suddenly everything changed. Suddenly there were skyscrapers, there were freeways, there was pollution. So I saw a city that I really loved sort of disappear under my feet and I moved away. I moved to the mountains. I spent time in the Sierras and worked at Yosemite National Park, and when I did that, that connection to nature hit me like a ton of bricks – I said this is where I want to be. I want to be in and around nature. I want to preserve it, if I can, because I could see that we were already a development-oriented society, I knew that. But the question for me was: if we only have that, we won’t have anything of nature left. So I guess I got committed at an early age to do whatever I could.

And then in 1970, I was at a conference in Vale, Colorado, and I remember there was a picture of renewable resources and non-renewable resources, extractable resources – oil, gas, coal – and all the politics, all the money, was going into non-renewables. And over here, where you had wind, solar, geothermal – that was new then, very new, so it wasn’t getting much attention – but there was nothing there. I thought well, if this continues, there won’t be anything left. It might make some short-term money for someone, but there won’t be anything left for future generations. But over here, look at all the possibilities for alternative energy and what’s happening. So I guess at that time I made a commitment to myself to do whatever I could, raise whatever small voice I had in that direction and so I have.

UN News Centre: What have been the greatest changes you have seen over the past 40 years or so of environmental activism?

Robert Redford: There was little to no change for much of that 40 years. Things don’t change quickly. You have to work hard, you have to wait, you have to be patient. I’m sorry that it didn’t happen soon because I think we would have been better off had it happened sooner. But you have to live with what you got. I think what is happening now is that it’s dawning on people, the value of alternative energy, and the jobs and industry that could be created from it. And as soon as you talk about industries and jobs then that changes the whole picture, because before the argument was always “oil and gas, that produces energy but also jobs and this doesn’t.” But now people are realizing that not only does alternative energy do this, but in a much better way that is sustainable for our planet.

UN News Centre: In your speech to the General Assembly, you said that you are an actor by trade, but an activist by nature. Where does your environmental work play in your life?

Robert Redford: My artistic life used to be just painting and then it became theatre and film, so that’s my artistic life. And then there’s my civic life, and that is the environment and the role that nature can play in the continuation of our society. So it’s divided into two sections: art and nature. I guess you can boil it down to that.

UN News Centre: In a nutshell, what message would you give to the international community on the importance of fighting climate change?
Robert Redford: First of all, pay attention. Put it out there as a topic. Once it’s out there as a topic, request that others pay attention to the topic and then see how, if they look around, how they can see why it is such a topic. If you talk about climate change, all you have to do is look around. Unfortunately, I declared some negative examples: flooding, drought, wildfires. But all you have to do is open your eyes and pay attention and you’ll look this way or that way, and you’ll see fire, flood, tornadoes, hurricanes, and if that’s the case, you can’t tell me it’s not going to affect people. So I would say pay attention and look at how climate change is being evidenced around you.

New UN report projects steady decline in food prices over next decade

1 July - Real prices for global agricultural products will continue their gradual decline over the coming decade due to a combination of strong crop yields, higher productivity and slower growth in global demand, according to a new report issued by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

Released in conjunction with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2015-2024 notes that as the low cost of oil pushes energy and fertilizer costs down and removes incentives for the production of first-generation biofuels made from food crops, food prices will continue to slope downwards over the next ten years.

In Asia, Europe and North America, additional agricultural production will be driven almost exclusively by yield improvements, whereas in South America yield improvements are projected to be complemented by additional agricultural area. Modest production growth is expected in Africa, although further investments could raise yields and production significantly.

Among the various commodities enjoying a decline in market costs, according to the Outlook, are cereal prices which – due to the concurrence of high cereal stocks and low oil prices – are expected to weaken in the short term. Over the medium term, however, slowly rising production costs and sustained demand may strengthen prices again.

For its part, high sugar demand in developing countries will likely boost prices for the commodity and spur further investment in the sector. The report suggests that the market outcome will nonetheless hinge on the ongoing competition between the profitability of sugar versus ethanol in Brazil, considered to be the world’s leading producer.

Despite the advantageous scenario regarding global food pricing, prices will likely remain at levels above those at the beginning of the 2000s, the report adds.

Major changes in demand are, in fact, expected throughout the developing world amid a growing population, rising per capita incomes and urbanization which, says the Outlook, will increase demand for food.

The report further explains that rising incomes will prompt consumers to continue diversifying their diets, notably by increasing their consumption of animal protein relative to starches. As a result, the prices of meat and dairy products are expected to be high relative to crop prices. Among crops, the prices of coarse grains and oilseeds, used for animal feed, should rise relative to the prices of food staples.