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‘2015 is a chance to change history,’ Ban tells UN Youth Forum

2 February - This generation of young people – the largest the world has ever seen – has a historic opportunity to end poverty, combat climate change, create jobs and fight injustice, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told a Youth Forum at UN Headquarters in New York this morning as he called on the participants to get involved in shaping a future sustainable development agenda.

“Some of you may be focused on your studies. Some of you may be thinking about your careers. I am going to be honest. It is rough out there,” Mr. Ban said at the 2015 Time for Global Action Youth Forum organized by the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Council President, Martin Sajdik, also addressed the meeting, as did the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi.

Today, there are 1.8 billion young people, representing one quarter of the world’s population. Many struggle to find work, and are often hit hardest in conflict. The Secretary-General says that it is time now to see this huge cohort as a force of change that harbours the ingenuity and creativity to help solve the world’s most daunting challenges.

“2015 is not just another year, it is a chance to change the course of history,” Mr. Ban said, as he emphasized that this is the “first generation with the potential to end poverty and the last generation to avoid worst effects of climate change.”

“It may be very hard to see what is happening beyond your borders. There are many people who are hungry, thirsty, and sick, and who cannot go to school. They are your brothers and sisters. This is why the UN is promoting sustainable development,” he added.

This year marks the end of implementation of the landmark UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which world leaders agreed on 15 years ago. There has been significant progress in meeting the targets. For example, global poverty has been halved well ahead of the 2015 deadline; in developing countries, 90 per cent of children now enjoy primary education; the number of people lacking access to improved drinking water has halved, and the fight against malaria and tuberculosis...
has shown results, according to the UN.

But challenges persist and with the deadline of the MDGs approaching this year, the UN will craft a new set of targets known as the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Today’s Youth Forum is a way to invite young people to get involved on the issues that matter to them, from job security to education. Globally, 73 million young people are looking for work and many more are trapped in exploitative jobs. In recent years, more than two and a half million more children in affluent countries fell into poverty, bringing the total above 76 million.

Children and adolescents bear the brunt of some of the world’s deadliest conflicts. In Nigeria last April, 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped by Boko Haram. In Pakistan in December, terrorists killed 132 children at school and the same day in Yemen, more than a dozen schoolgirls were killed in a car bombing. Children are at risk in Central African Republic, Gaza, Syria, Iraq and South Sudan.

Mr. Sajdik, President of ECOSOC, said that for a child born in 1990, the base year for calculating progress in achieving the MDGs, he/she might be one of the 76 million young people currently unemployed or earn less than $2 per day – like 200 million other young people.

The young person born in 1990 is likely to be part of the 20 per cent of all youth in developing countries not engaged in education, employment or training. The situation is even worse for girls and young women, who face additional disadvantage and gender-based discrimination. Fewer girls and young women complete secondary level education, and young women aged 15-24 have HIV infection rates twice as high as young men for reasons beyond their control.

“The question is no longer if youth engagement is necessary but how to strengthen it,” said Mr. Sajdik, welcoming young people to voice their opinions on development, policy, climate change and education.

“There’s no doubt that young people are facing multiple challenges to meet their potential but they are not giving up,” emphasized Youth Envoy Mr. Alhendawi.

“Everywhere I go, I see how the youth want to be connected to the United Nations; they will not miss any opportunity to volunteer and to advocate. They will participate at the Model UN just to simulate what’s happening in the rooms with delegates. Today we are not simulating. This is the United Nations in action.”

As the UN representative on all things relating to young people, Mr. Alhendawi said that a “sense of ownership” is critical to the success of the future sustainable development agenda. The 1.8 billion young people worldwide are ready to “carry their share” of the post-2015 development.

In a keynote address urging an uptick in investment for children around the world, children’s activist and 2007 International Children’s Peace Prize Winner, Thandiwe Chama, called on delegates to be “on the right side of history” and place “our rights, the rights of children and youth, at the heart of the SDG agenda.”

“We should not only speak about youth engagement but also include children as key stakeholders,” Ms. Chama told those gathered, warning that without careful investment, children face a “wasted future.”

The young activist and co-founder of ‘KidsRights Youngsters’ emphasized that the world’s children continue to face daunting challenges including violence, child labour, abuse, and limited access to education. In addition, she noted, youth leadership, education, health and gender equality remained “key preconditions” for a successful post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

“We cannot achieve the SDGs without ensuring that my rights are the same as those of my brothers,” she continued. “Strengthen, fund and empower us.”
21st century ‘hottest’ on record as global warming continues, UN agency warns

2 February - Devastating weather patterns and increasing temperatures will last into the foreseeable future as global warming is expected to continue, the United Nations World Meteorological Organization (WMO) confirmed today as it explained that 2014’s ranking as the “hottest year on record” is part of a larger climate trend.

“The overall warming trend is more important than the ranking of an individual year,” WMO Secretary-General Michel Jarraud clarified today in a press release. “Analysis of the datasets indicates that 2014 was nominally the warmest on record, although there is very little difference between the three hottest years.”

High sea temperatures, the UN agency has said, have contributed to exceptionally heavy rainfall and floods in many countries and extreme drought in others. Twelve major Atlantic storms battered the United Kingdom in early months of 2014, while floods devastated much of the Balkans throughout May. The monthly precipitation over the Pacific side of western Japan for August 2014, meanwhile, was 301 per cent above normal – the highest since area-averaged statistics began in 1946.

At the same time, crippling droughts have struck large swathes of the continental United States while Northeast China and parts of the Yellow River basin did not reach half of the summer average, causing severe drought.

The diverse climate impact which afflicted nations around the planet throughout 2014 were, in fact, consistent with the expectation of a changing climate, Mr. Jarraud continued.

In addition, he warned that 14 of the 15 hottest years recorded have all been in the 21st century, adding the UN agency’s expectation that global warming would continue “given that rising levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and the increasing heat content of the oceans are committing us to a warmer future.”

Around 93 per cent of the excess energy trapped in the atmosphere by greenhouse gases from fossil fuels and other human activities ends up in the oceans, the WMO press release noted, as it pointed out that global sea-surface temperatures had reached “record levels” in 2014, even in the absence of a “fully developed El Niño” weather pattern. High temperatures in 1998 – the hottest year before the 21st century – occurred during a strong El Niño year.

The WMO has released its latest findings regarding its global temperature analysis in advance of climate change negotiations scheduled to be held in Geneva from 8 to 13 February. These talks are expected to help pave the way towards the December 2015 conference scheduled in Paris, France, where a new universal UN-backed treaty on climate change will be adopted.

UN-hosted civil aviation conference to take up aircraft tracking, conflict zone risks

2 February - The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has brought together aviation experts and strategic decision makers for a four-day conference that will discuss emerging safety issues such as global tracking of aircraft and risks to civil aviation arising from conflict zones.

Some 500 delegates have gathered at ICAO headquarters in Montréal, Canada, for the Second High-level Safety Conference to cover three major themes: reviewing the current situation, the future approach to manage aviation safety and facilitating increased regional
cooperation.

“The participation of Directors General of Civil Aviation and strategic decision-makers will provide the international civil aviation community the opportunity to build consensus, obtain commitments and formulate recommendations deemed necessary for the effective and efficient progress of key aviation safety activities,” according to ICAO.

“In particular,” ICAO said, “the conference will also be invited to discuss emerging safety issues, including the global tracking of aircraft and risks to civil aviation arising from conflict zones.”

Among the side events scheduled during the conference include sessions on emerging issues such as the management of Ebola; search and rescue practices; the risks to civil aviation arising from conflict zones; and the development of a future Global Distress Safety System to enhance the capability to track aircraft, locate an accident site and retrieve Cockpit Voice Recorder and Flight Data Recorder information.

The conference take place following last year’s downing of a Malaysia Airlines flight over eastern Ukraine, and the disappearance of another Malaysian Airlines flight upon take off from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Also listed among the side events are sessions on current initiatives to assist accident victims and their families and protection of safety information.

This past December, the Secretary-General addressed an Extraordinary Session of ICAO’s Permanent Council to mark the 70th anniversary of the Convention on International Aviation, better known as the Chicago Convention after the city where United States city where it was signed in 1944.

The Convention, which established ICAO, a specialized UN agency tasked with coordinating and regulating international air travel, sets rules of airspace, aircraft registration and safety, and undertakes compliance audits, performs studies and analyses.

“It is through these provisions – as well as ICAO’s complementary policy, auditing and capacity-building efforts – that today’s global air transport network is able to operate close to 100,000 daily flights, safely, efficiently and securely in every region of the world,” according to ICAO.

**UN helicopter crew returns safely to South Sudan after emergency landing**

2 February - The crew of a United Nations-operated helicopter that was forced to land in South Sudan have been returned safely to a World Food Programme (WFP) office, according to a press statement released by the agency today.

“It is regrettable that this incident took place,” said WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin. “However, we are greatly relieved that the WFP crew members are unhurt and back with us.”

The six Bulgarian crew members were flying an Mi-8 helicopter contracted to the WFP from Rumbek in South Sudan to Khartoum in Sudan, where the aircraft was due to undergo regular maintenance. They came under fired from members of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army-North (SPLM-N) and were forced to make an emergency landing in a remote area of Sudan’s South Kordofan state.

The WFP worked with authorities both in Sudan and South Sudan to locate and recover the crew when contact was lost with the helicopter. Last Monday, the SPLM-N said it was holding the crew, all of whom were unharmed.

Negotiations for the crew’s release continued throughout the week, with a group known as the New Sudan Women’s League saying it engaged with the SPLM-N to arrange the return of the crew.
The crew was released on Sunday morning and reached a WFP office in Yida near the border with South Kordofan before being flown by another WFP-contracted aircraft from Yida to the Southern Sudanese capital of Juba.

The WFP-managed UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) provides air transportation for emergency response in areas of hunger. It provides a critical service for the entire humanitarian community in South Sudan, giving efficient, safe and reliable air transport to humanitarian organisations. It operates on the principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality, regardless of politics.

**At least 1,375 people killed by violence in January, says UN Iraq Mission**

2 February - Violence in Iraq killed a total of at least 1,375 people last month, according to figures released today by the United Nations Mission (UNAMI) in the country, with the majority of those killed civilians.

At least 790 of those killed were civilians, including 59 civilian police, with a further 1,469 civilians injured, including 69 civilian police. The Iraqi military lost 585 soldiers in the time period, with another 771 injured.

Last year was the country’s deadliest since the 2006-2007 biennium, with a total of 12,282 Iraqis killed and another 23,126 injured, as militants associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) conducted an ongoing offensive against the Government.

The UN Mission reported that the worst affected Governorate was Baghdad, where 256 people were killed and 758 were injured. Elsewhere, 114 were reported killed and 49 injured in Diyala, with 100 killed and 52 injured in Salahuddin. In Ninewa, 85 civilians were killed and 12 injured, and in Kirkuk, 14 were killed and 6 injured.

In general, UNAMI says, it is hindered in effectively verifying casualties in conflict areas and its figures for casualties from Anbar Governorate are provided by the Health Directorate in that Governorate. Their figures state that 195 civilians were killed in Anbar, with another 584 injured.

Often, the Mission is able only to partially verify certain incidents. In addition to the figures quoted, it has received, without being able to verify, reports of large numbers of casualties along with unknown numbers of persons who have died from secondary effects of violence after having fled their homes due to exposure to the elements, lack of water, food, medicines and health care. As such, the figures presented are considered to be the absolute minimum.

**UNESCO chief condemns killing of journalists in Mexico, Syria**

2 February - The head of the United Nations agency mandated to defend press freedom today denounced the assassination of Moisés Sánchez Cerezo, a Mexican journalist recently found murdered weeks after his disappearance, and Kenji Goto, a Japanese freelance killed by Islamist extremists in Syria.

“His killing is an unacceptable attack on journalism, a profession that embodies the right of freedom of expression, which is indispensable to democracy,” lamented Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in a press release issued earlier today.

“I call on the Mexican authorities to shed light on this crime and bring its perpetrators to justice.”

Moisés Sánchez Cerezo's body was discovered on 24 January, three weeks after he was abducted from his home by armed men who also confiscated his computer, camera and mobile phone.
As owner and editor of the weekly magazine, *La Unión*, Mr. Sánchez Cerezo regularly denounced problems of insecurity in the Mexican city of Medellín de Bravo, in the state of Veracruz.

Mr. Sánchez Cerezo's death comes amid a deteriorating security situation across Mexico in which numerous journalists and activists have lost their lives.

In a report released in March 2014, UNESCO stressed the growing trend of media workers being killed around the world. Focusing on the latest challenges affecting media development and freedom of expression, the report, called “World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development,” noted that more than 430 journalists were killed between 2007 and 2012.

In a separate press release, Ms. Bokova also condemned the murder of Japanese freelance journalist, Kenji Goto, at the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Mr. Goto was a seasoned war journalist who had previously worked in Afghanistan and Syria and remained “dedicated to exposing the suffering that conflict imposes on citizens,” the Director-General said.

He had travelled to Syria in late October and went missing shortly thereafter. On 31 January, ISIL released a video of his beheading.

“His cold-blooded murder was a vile act that I condemn in the strongest possible terms,” Ms. Bokova continued.

“I urge the authorities to do everything within their power to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice. I also call on journalists and all media workers covering events in Iraq and Syria, and in other conflict zones, to take all necessary measures for enhancing their safety.”

**Egypt: UN chief welcomes release of detained journalist, urges Government to release others**

*2 February* - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has applauded the decision by the Egyptian authorities to release the detained *Al Jazeera* journalist, Peter Greste, ending his 400-day imprisonment.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban welcomed the move but noted that other journalists were still detained in Egypt,” adding that he hoped their cases would also be resolved shortly.

Mr. Greste and his two colleagues, Mohamed Fahmy and Baher Mohamed, were arrested in 2013 for carrying out legitimate news reporting activities, according to the UN human rights office (OHCHR), and were subsequently convicted and sentenced in June 2014 by an Egyptian court. Media reports suggest that Mr. Greste, an Australian national, has already left the country while Mr. Fahmy and Mr. Mohamed remain jailed.

“The Secretary-General again underscores the importance of safeguarding freedom of speech and association in Egypt,” the statement continued, reiterating Mr. Ban’s “continued commitment to supporting the Egyptian people’s struggle for stability, democracy, and prosperity.”

“He strongly believes that pluralism is key for achieving long-term stability, including the guarantee that all peaceful voices are heard and represented.”

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a binding treaty that Egypt ratified in 1982, states that ‘Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.’
Nevertheless, journalists working for other media organizations have reported being attacked by Government supporters after being accused of working for *Al Jazeera*. A video also emerged last year which appeared to show a police officer threatening a camera crew working for another TV station that, if they did not stop filming, he would tell bystanders they worked for *Al Jazeera* so that they would be attacked.

**UN deplores ISIL's 'barbaric' murder of Japanese journalist**

1 February - The United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Security Council have deplored the apparent murder of a Japanese journalist Kenji Goto by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), despite the Council’s demand for his immediate release.

A statement to the press issued by the 15-member Council earlier today said that this crime “heinous and cowardly crime” is, yet again, a tragic reminder of the increasing dangers journalists and others face every day in Syria.

It also demonstrates the brutality of ISIL, which is responsible for thousands of abuses against the Syrian and Iraqi people, added the Council.

Mr. Goto's beheading was confirmed by the group in a video message released on Saturday, 31 January. Last week, the terror group released a video depicting the murder of Japanese citizen Haruna Yukawa.

In a separate statement issued last night, the Secretary-General also condemned the “barbaric” murder of Kenji Goto, saying that his death underscores the violence that so many have been subjected to in Iraq and Syria. Mr. Ban expressed deepest condolences to Mr. Goto’s family, as well as the people and Government of Japan. He reiterated his call for unconditional release of all hostages held by Daesh and others.

Like the UN chief, Security Council members expressed their deep sympathy to Mr. Goto’s family and to the people of Japan. The members underlined the need to bring perpetrators of acts of terrorism to justice. Those responsible for the killing of Kenji Goto must be held accountable, they stressed, urging all States to cooperate with Japan.

ISIL must be defeated and the violence and hatred it espouses stamped out, Council members stressed, emphasizing that such “acts of barbarism perpetrated by ISIL do not intimidate them but rather stiffen their resolve.”

The Security Council demanded the immediate, safe and unconditional release of all those who are kept hostage by ISIL, Al-Nusra Front and all other groups associated with Al-Qaida. They also recalled that, in accordance with international humanitarian law, journalists, media professionals and associated personnel engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict are considered as civilians and shall be respected and protected as such.

They also recalled that ISIL is included on the Al-Qaida Sanctions List and is thus subject to the asset freeze and arms embargo in resolution 2161 (2014). Any individual or entity that provides financial or material support to the group, including the provision of arms or recruits, is eligible to be added to the Al-Qaida Sanctions List and subject to sanctions measures.

Members of the Security Council reaffirmed the need to combat by all means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts, and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation.
UN chief welcomes African Union's decision to combat Boko Haram

31 January - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the decision of the African Union to join forces to stop the advancement of the “murderous campaigns” waged by Boko Haram, as he stressed the importance of the continent's collaboration with the UN, emphasizing that “lives depend on preventive-diplomacy and peacekeeping.”

Mr. Ban is in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, this weekend for the African Union (AU) Summit, a gathering of the continent's 54 nations, to discuss daunting challenges including the growing threat of Boko Haram. At the Summit's closing today, African leaders pledged to join forces to fight the terror group, which has in recent weeks attacked villages in Cameroon, displacing thousands to neighbouring countries and sparking fears that its insurgency was expanding beyond Nigeria.

Speaking to reporters today, the UN chief said he supported the AU's plan to fight the terror group with the establishment of a Multinational Joint Task Force, which must remain consistent with UN human rights due diligence policies.

“The murderous campaign waged by Boko Haram demands stronger and more coordinated action from us all,” Mr. Ban said.

“Regional and international efforts must focus on protecting communities in northern Nigeria and across borders. More than a million internally displaced people and refugees must be able to return home,” the Secretary-General added, reiterating his call for the immediate release of those who have been abducted, particularly the girls from Chibok.

Collaboration on peace and security is essential to the UN's partnership with the AU in that more than 80 per cent of UN peacekeepers are deployed on the continent. Mr. Ban said that through the UN-AU partnership, progress has been made in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. More, however, could be done by working “even more closely together”.

Such close partnership has paid off in the fight against the Ebola epidemic, Mr. Ban continued, commending the AU for being on the “front lines” of fighting the deadly virus. Efforts are paying off and while “we are beginning to turn the tide,” Ebola is far from over.

“We must continue to demonstrate the same solidarity until Ebola is gone from every country, and throughout the next phase of recovery,” the UN chief said.

After all, he continued, peace and development go hand-in-hand. Africa has made substantial progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and has the opportunity this year, like the rest of the world, to commit to a new post-2015 development agenda and a universal agreement on climate change.

“African families, communities and economies have much to gain from both these historic agreements,” Mr. Ban continued, urging leaders of the continent to “listen to their people and respect their wishes and aspirations”.

Several African countries will hold elections this year, he said, pledging that the UN and AU will work together to support nations to organize peaceful and credible polls. Mr. Ban also urged leaders to respect constitutional and legal limits on their terms of office.

Mr. Ban also strongly condemned the terrorist attacks in North Sinai, earlier this week which killed dozens of people, including civilians, and injured scores of others.
In his remarks to a meeting on ensuring peace and security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Secretary-General said that despite progress made in “stamping out” the activities of armed groups, scores of civilians have been killed in recent months in the Beni area.

This only underscores the importance of eradicating all illegal armed groups from the region, Mr. Ban told the Fifth Meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and region. Welcoming the use of military force against the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, or the FDLR, he added, that while “military action will not resolve this issue,” it is vital to eliminate the threat posed by the FDLR once and for all.

The Secretary-General also expressed concern at the slow progress in implementing the Nairobi Declarations. More than a year after those accords were signed, the amnesty and repatriation of eligible former fighters from M23 and other armed groups have not been completed. Governments of the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda must to intensify efforts to complete this process.

Also today in a meeting with Mali’s Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr. Ban deplored the recent incidents in Gao, in the northern part of the embattled country. He reiterated the UN’s commitment to work closely with the Malian Government to find out exactly what happened and encouraged the Government to continue to lead the peace process. Meanwhile, the Malian Minister, Abdoulaye Diop, reiterated his Government’s support for the UN’s peacekeeping mission in the country, known as MINUSMA.