As Yemen conflict intensifies, UN relief chief urges all sides to do more to protect civilians

2 April - Extremely concerned for the safety of civilians caught in the midst of “fierce fighting” in Yemen, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator called today on all parties involved to meet their obligations under international law and do their utmost to protect the ordinary women, children and men who are suffering the consequences of the conflict.

In a statement issued by her office this afternoon, Valerie Amos, who is also the Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said reports from humanitarian partners in different parts of the country indicate that some 519 people have been killed and nearly 1,700 injured in the past two weeks – over 90 of them children.

Further, Ms. Amos said tens of thousands of people have fled their homes, some by crossing the sea to Djibouti and Somalia. Electricity, water and essential medicines are in short supply.

“Those engaged in fighting must ensure that hospitals, schools, camps for refugees and those internally displaced and civilian infrastructure, especially in populated areas, are not targeted or used for military purposes,” she said.

Despite the grave dangers, she continued, United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners are coordinating with the Yemen Red Crescent and local authorities to deliver emergency health kits, generators so that people can get clean water, food and blankets.
“Before this recent escalation in the violence, millions of Yemenis were already extremely vulnerable. I hope that peace, security and stability will be restored as soon as possible,” Ms. Amos concluded.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator’s statement on the rising tide of violence in Yemen and the plight faced by civilians in the crisis-gripped country joins warnings issued by host of UN officials throughout the week, including Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, who just yesterday drew attention to the mounting number of child casualties, and urged all parties involved in military operations to “avoid creating new risks” for Yemen’s children and to adhere to international law.

In addition, this past Tuesday, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, sat the situation in Yemen was extremely alarming, with dozens of civilians killed over the past four days, echoing a statement issued later that day by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Spokesperson.

“The country seems to be on the verge of total collapse,” High Commissioner Zeid warned, calling on all sides to protect civilians from harm, and to resolve their differences through dialogue rather than through the use of military force.

UN chief welcomes accord on Iran’s nuclear programme

2 April - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today congratulated the team of international negotiators and Iran on achieving a political framework that paves the way for an historic comprehensive joint plan of action on Iran’s nuclear programme to be achieved by 30 June.

“That comprehensive agreement will provide for substantial limits on Iran’s nuclear programme and for the removal of all sanctions,” said Mr. Ban in a statement released by his spokesperson, following the announcement that Iran and the Foreign Ministers of the so-called ‘E3+3’ (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States), had reached a deal.

“It will respect Iran’s needs and rights while providing assurances to the international community that its nuclear activities will remain exclusively peaceful,” Mr. Ban’s statement continued.

The statement added that the Secretary-General is convinced that a comprehensive, negotiated solution to the Iranian nuclear issue will contribute to peace and stability in the region and enable all countries to cooperate urgently to deal with the many serious security challenges they face.

Libya: UN mission strongly condemns air strikes on western airport

2 April - The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) today strongly condemned repeated air strikes on an airport in the western town of Zintan that it said have endangered civilians and seriously undermined attempts at securing a solution to the Libyan crisis.

In a statement, UNSMIL reminded all parties that under international humanitarian law, the repeated attacks on civilian facilities in recent days may constitute war crimes.

With significant efforts under way towards a comprehensive ceasefire and progress made on de-escalating hostilities – such as in the Oil Crescent area – the UN Mission urged all military actors to desist from taking actions that increase tensions.

UNSMIL chief Bernardino Léon has been facilitating successive rounds of talks between Libyan parties – initially hosted by the UN Office at Geneva and then moving on to Algeria and, just last week, Morocco – and recently warned that while the parties are entering a “decisive round” in the negotiations, ongoing fighting in Libya and tensions elsewhere in the region...
sounded “another alarm” regarding the delicate nature of the country’s peace-building process.

Senior UN officials condemn terrorist attack against Kenyan university

2 April - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the head of the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization have strongly condemned this morning’s terrorist attack on a university in north-eastern Kenya, with both officials expressing solidarity with the Kenyan people and urging swift justice for those responsible for the deadly attack.

A statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York said that the attack, perpetrated on the campus of the Garissa University College, in Garissa, Kenya, reportedly left dozens dead and injured with an unconfirmed number of students held hostage.

The Secretary-General in his statement voiced hope that the situation would be quickly brought under control without further harm to those being held and called for those responsible to be “swiftly brought to justice.”

“The Secretary-General reiterates his solidarity with the people and the Government of Kenya, as well as the continuing support of the United Nations to Kenya and the countries of the region in their efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism,” the statement continued.

In addition, the statement said Mr. Ban conveyed his “deeply-felt condolences to the families of the victims and wishes a speedy recovery to the wounded.”

In a separate statement, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova also strongly condemned the incident, and stressed that a time when operations were still ongoing to lift the siege on the University, “this vicious attack against an institution of higher learning is a deliberate attack against the future of a country, against the ambition of students to gain the qualifications to pursue a career and contribute to their nation.”

“It is the quest for knowledge, the freedom to think critically and to question the world– the hallmarks of a university – that is under threat,” said Ms. Bokova, calling for the perpetrators to be brought to justice, and extending her heartfelt condolences to the Government of Kenya, and to the students, faculty and families who have been affected by this tragedy.

UN inquiry into violent Mail protests submits report; Ban ‘profoundly regrets’ civilian casualties

2 April - An inquiry launched in February to determine the facts surrounding a violent demonstration in Gao, Mali, in front of the regional headquarters of the United Nations mission in the country has submitted its report, according to a statement made today by the Secretary-General’s spokesperson.

The inquiry into the violence, which took place on 27 January this year, determined that members of a UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) used unauthorized and excessive force on civilian protesters during the demonstration, resulting in the death by gunfire of three protesters and the wounding of four others.

Additionally, the Inquiry established that some protesters and organizers of the demonstration bear responsibility for the violence of the protest, which included Molotov cocktails, stone throwing and attempts to breach the perimeter of the Regional MINUSMA Headquarters in Gao. It also noted that MINUSMA security forces were left to face protesters on their own in violation of the Status of Forces Agreement with the host country. Five MINUSMA police officers were wounded during the event.
“The Secretary-General profoundly regrets the casualties among civilians resulting from the excessive use of force during this event by the MINUSMA personnel concerned,” said the Secretary-General’s statement. “He condemns it as a violation of the MINUSMA Directive on the Use of Force. The Secretary-General is committed to ensuring that the responsible individuals are held fully accountable for their actions.”

The statement pointed to steps being taken in that regard with the authorities of Mali and the relevant police-contributing country and said the Secretary-General encouraged the Government of Mali to take appropriate steps to prevent future such incidents.

“Communications, management and crisis procedures within MINUSMA will also be examined to prevent the recurrence of such acts,” the statement said, adding that the Secretary-General is committed to ensuring justice for the victims and their families according to local customs and appropriate United Nations procedures.

“MINUSMA is in contact with the local authorities and with the individuals and families concerned in this regard,” the statement said. “On behalf of the United Nations, the Secretary-General expresses his deepest apologies to the victims and their families.”

The statement concluded by noting that the UN, and MINUSMA in particular, remain committed to supporting the stabilisation of Mali.

**Ban launches ‘call to action’ inviting commitments from businesses to employ people with autism**

2 April - At a special event at United Nations Headquarters to mark World Autism Awareness Day, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called today for greater access and work opportunities for persons with autism, saying that while much progress had been made, much more work was needed.

“People with autism have enormous potential,” said Mr. Ban. “Most have remarkable visual, artistic or academic skills. Thanks to the use of assistive technologies, non-verbal persons with autism can communicate and share their untapped capabilities. Recognizing the talents of persons on the autism spectrum, rather than focusing on their weaknesses, is essential to creating a society that is truly inclusive.”

The special event and the UN-wide observance, convened to mark the Day, was organized by the UN Department of Public Information and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in cooperation with The Specialist People Foundation, with the support of the UN Global Compact.

Opening the programme was Cristina Gallach, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information. A keynote address was delivered by Jack Markell, Governor of Delaware. The event focused on measures required to support growth in employment opportunities for people on the autism spectrum.

In his remarks, Mr. Ban said that for his wife, Yoo Soon-taek, autism awareness was a personal cause and as such, the two launched today an employment “Call to Action,” inviting businesses to make concrete commitments to employ people on the autism spectrum.

He urged businesses to understand the “unique and often exceptional” skills of people with autism, stressing the importance of doing so because even where awareness is high, more than 80 per cent of adults with autism remain unemployed.

“That is why it is so important for companies to understand their unique and often exceptional skills, and to enable work environments where they can excel,” he said. “We encourage public offices, corporations, and small businesses to have a closer look at the way they perceive people with autism, to take the time to learn about the condition and to create life-changing opportunities.”
Vocational training was needed, together with adequate support and recruitment processes that allow people to successfully integrate into workforces around the world. He was encouraged by the efforts of forward-thinking businesses that recognize the value that people with autism have to offer.

“I’m so pleased to see many of the leaders of these companies represented here today, to share with us their experiences and to help inspire others to benefit from this largely untapped pool of talent,” he said.

Mr. Ban noted that the UN General Assembly had also sounded the call for greater access and opportunities and that theme was taken up by the Assembly Vice-President, Einar Gunnarsson, Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations, who said the Assembly’s recognition showed that autism is a growing global health crisis that needed concerted action.

Mr. Gunnarsson, who was speaking on behalf of the Assembly President, Sam Kutesa, added that the autism went beyond a public health issue, and was a national and global development concern.

Today, one in 68 people has an autism spectrum disorder, amounting to an estimated 1% of the world’s population,” he said. “The vast majority of those affected are children. The prevalence figures are growing.”

The Day should serve to increase and develop world knowledge of autism, he said, calling for translation of growing awareness of autism into concrete steps to address the myriad issues posed by autism.

“We must all do our part in inspiring compassion, empowerment and hope,” he said. “Each and every one of us should join this effort to increase and improve understanding in our communities but also at the global level of the challenges of autism.”

Cristina Gallach, Under-Secretary-General for Public Information opened the event, noting the “vital role” played by World Autism Awareness Day in calling international attention to autism, drawing the link between increased understanding of the condition and removal of its stigma.

“Today, our focus is on employment – on the right of people on the autism spectrum to work on an equal basis with others,” she said. “Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the key human rights treaty which provides the foundation for what we are discussing here today, recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others.”

**UN agency calls on Syrians to protect cultural heritage amid uptick in violence**

2 April - Syrians must unite for the protection of their shared cultural heritage amid a recent escalation in hostilities across the war-torn country, the head of the United Nations cultural agency declared today.

A recent uptick in violence and shelling in the cities of Bosra and Idleb has sparked widespread concern across the UN system for the safety of the cities’ inhabitants as well as their historical sites, including the Idlib, Maarrat al Numaan and Bosra Museums.

“This heritage belongs to all Syrians and to all humanity,” Irina Bokova, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) affirmed in a press release. “I call on all parties from using cultural heritage sites for military purposes and to protect them from any damage and destruction resulting from fighting.”

Last weekend, Idleb, located in northwest Syria, reportedly fell under the control of a coalition of anti-Government armed groups, according to the UN Office for the High Commissioner (OHCHR). The city was subsequently shelled by Government airplanes, resulting in the deaths of at least 15 civilians. The Syrian Air Force then expanded its raids throughout the governorate of Idleb, attacking the towns of Sarmin, Mantaf and Nayrab.
Ms. Bokova’s appeal comes as UNESCO launches its #Unite4Heritage social media campaign aimed at countering the propaganda of cultural cleansing in Syria, Iraq and other crisis-torn countries.

“Areas around cultural heritage sites and museums should remain protected and be kept out of the conflict,” Ms. Bokova continued, adding her satisfaction for the recent freeze in hostilities at the World Heritage Site of Bosra.

“The recent developments in Bosra are encouraging and commendable. We need to build on such initiatives to expand protected cultural areas.”

Despite the international community’s ongoing attempts to halt the violence, the situation in Syria continues its downwards spiral. Some 12.2 million people, including 5.6 million children, now need humanitarian assistance.

By conservative estimates, more than 220,000 Syrians have died in the conflict, but that number is likely much higher. Four out of five Syrians live in poverty and the country has lost nearly four decades of human development, with unemployment at over 50 per cent. Life expectancy has been cut by 20 years.

Sharp fall in sugar drives downward spiral of food prices – UN

2 April - According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the global food prices continued to decline in March – dropping some 40 points below last year’s level – with sugar prices sliding to their lowest level since February 2009.

Noting a 1.5 per cent drop since February and 18.7 per cent overall descent from a year ago, FAO concluded that the dipping prices for vegetable oils, cereals and meat more than offset a rise in dairy prices – contributing to the lower index, which in March averaged 173.8 points.

The FAO Food Price Index is a trade-weighted guide that aggregates price sub-indices of cereals, meat, dairy products, vegetable oils and sugar prices on international markets. On a downward path since April 2014, abundant supplies and the rising US dollar have pushed down international prices of most food commodities.

Mainly due to improved crop prospects, sugar dropped a sharp 9.2 per cent since February to 187.9 points in March. The continued weakening of the Brazilian currency against the US dollar also contributed to the change.

A 2015 downward trend in cereal prices, which averaged 169.8 points in March – down 1.1 per cent from February and some 18.7 percent below its level a year earlier – is attributable to large export supplies and mounting inventories, in particular for wheat and maize.

Witnessing nearly a 3.1 per cent drop since February, the vegetable oil averaged 151.7 points in March – its lowest value since September 2009.

Also, meat averaged 177 points, down 1 per cent from its revised February value, while dairy rose for the second consecutive month to average 184.9 points, a 1.7 per cent increase from February.

Meanwhile, according to FAO’s latest Cereal Supply and Demand Brief, due to a larger than anticipated maize harvest in the European Union (EU), the 2014 cereal output estimate was raised to 2,544 million tons, which, if confirmed, would outstrip the 2013 record by 1 per cent.

Looking ahead to 2015, reduced plantings in the EU global wheat production are expected to lead to a 1 per cent drop in the current 2014 estimate – yielding 722 million tons this year. While China, India and Pakistan are all expected to harvest close to 2014’s record levels, production is predicted to decline in the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

As for coarse grains, preparations are only now under way for plantings in the northern hemisphere. However, in the
southern hemisphere where crops are more advanced, early indications point to a decline in 2015 production from last year’s high levels. In particular, following severe precipitation shortfalls earlier this year, South Africa’s maize production is expected to decline by a sharp 33 per cent.

Rice production prospects for 2015 are generally positive in the southern hemisphere, with sizeable increases forecasted in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Colombia and Paraguay. By contrast, Australian output is officially anticipated to fall by 18 per cent, reflecting lingering shortages of irrigation water.

At the same time, FAO projected close to a 17 million tons increase in 2014-2015 world cereal utilization – to 2,493 million tons – largely mirroring historical revisions in China and India.

By the end of the 2015 crop season, the world cereal stocks forecast stands at 645 million tons – a sharp upward change since last month’s report – which mainly reflects ascending revisions to wheat and maize stocks in China. Based on the current forecasts for cereal stocks and utilization, the cereal stocks-to-use ratio is expected to reach 25.9 per cent in 2014-2015, its highest value since 2001-2002.

**Lebanon a ‘ray of hope’ for tolerance in Middle East – UN rights expert**

2 April - Amid escalating tensions throughout the Middle East, the country of Lebanon, known for its rich cultural diversity, can be a “ray of hope” for tolerance in a region beset by religious fanaticism, a United Nations human rights expert has said.

“Diversity as well as freedom of religion or belief must be preserved and further developed in order to build resilience against the spiralling religious extremism in the Middle East region,” stated Heiner Bielefeldt, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, in a press release issued today following an eleven-day visit to the country.

“In these challenging times, Lebanon can be the ray of hope in the region and beyond for as long as it preserves and promotes its legacy of religious diversity.”

The Special Rapporteur noted that the Lebanese people had learned the importance of coexisting under precarious conditions in a geopolitical neighbourhood otherwise known for its sectarian frictions. Interreligious dialogues, cooperation, and Lebanese citizenship all were enabling factors in preserving the peaceful amalgam of Lebanese society, he added.

At the same time, continued Mr. Bielefeldt, overcoming Lebanon’s political confessionalism remained an important milestone for the country on its journey to becoming a civil state based on rule of law.

Lebanon’s political framework, in fact, allows for a proportional division of power sharing among the country’s diverse make-up of ethnicities and religions.

Despite this, there has been a presidential vacuum in Lebanon after the term of Michel Sleiman came to an end on 25 May 2014. UN officials and the Security Council have repeatedly urged the Lebanese Parliament to elect a new leader without delay.

“Disentangling the tightly knit web of religious loyalties, political affiliations, social positions and societal opportunities may then enhance the prospects of common citizenship,” the Special Rapporteur stressed.

“Even though equal power sharing on one hand maintains stable relationships among religious denominations, it may on the other hand weaken the civil structure and reinforce political fragmentation.”

Mr. Bielefeldt similarly observed that allowing civil marriage in Lebanon would further strengthen the country’s respect for diversity by both mainstreaming and streamlining the union of mixed couples while removing potential discriminatory threats against them.
“It is furthermore inevitable for the society, especially the younger generation to tackle complicated facts of recent history in Lebanon,” he concluded. “Without proper history teaching and memorialisation process, a climate of mistrust against each other between different religious communities may persist.”

**Afghanistan: UN envoy deplores latest deadly attack on civilians**

2 April - The top United Nations envoy for Afghanistan has condemned “in the strongest terms” today’s deadly suicide attack in the city of Khost, in the country’s far east, which reportedly left dozens of people dead and injured.

According to reports, a suicide bomber detonated his explosive devices among a group of civilians participating in a peaceful demonstration against corruption not far from the Khost Provincial Governor’s residence. The attack killed 16 people and injured at least 40, including four children.

“Such an attack deliberately targeting a group of civilians is an atrocity,” declared Nicholas Haysom, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in a press statement. “Those responsible for this callous crime must be held accountable.”

The bombing is the latest in a series of targeted attacks in Afghanistan which made 2014 the deadliest for civilians, according to a UNAMA report released in February. Last year, in fact, saw a total of 3,699 civilians were killed and 6,849 injured – the highest number of civilian casualties recorded in a single year since the UN started keeping track in 2007.

In his statement, Mr. Haysom expressed his condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery for those injured.

**Marking World Day, UN calls on businesses to commit to employing people with autism**

2 April - On World Autism Awareness Day, the United Nations is spotlighting the unique skills of people with autism and the need to recognize their talents through an initiative inviting businesses to make concrete commitments to employ people on the autism spectrum.

“People with autism have enormous potential. Most have remarkable visual, artistic or academic skills. Thanks to the use of assistive technologies, non-verbal persons with autism can communicate and share their hidden capabilities,” said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a statement on the Day.

“Yet even where autism awareness is most advanced, more than 80 per cent of adults with autism are unemployed. That is why it is so important for employers to understand their unique and often exceptional skills, and to enable work environments where they can excel,” he added.

At a Headquarters event today, Mr. Ban will launch a 'Call to Action' initiative to urge employers to create work zones where people with autism can excel, as most have remarkable visual, artistic or academic skills.

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that manifests itself during the first three years of life. It results from a neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain, mostly affecting children and adults in many countries irrespective of gender, race or socio-economic status. It is characterized by impairments in social interaction, problems with verbal and non-verbal communication and restricted, repetitive behaviour, interests and activities.
And recent data suggests that employers are missing out on the abilities of people on the autism spectrum which they have in greater abundance than 'neurotypical' workers do – such as, heightened abilities in pattern recognition and logical reasoning, as well as a greater attention to detail. But hurdles to employment for those with autism include a shortage of vocational training, inadequate support with job placement, and pervasive discrimination.

World Autism Awareness Day – marked globally on 2 April – aims to foster greater understanding and empower parents into seeking early intervention therapies. It also invites policy-makers to encourage schools to open their doors to students with autism.

“We encourage public offices, corporations, and small businesses to have a closer look at the way they perceive people with autism, to take the time to learn about the condition and to create life-changing opportunities,” the UN chief said.

This important mission can only be achieved with appropriate vocational training and adequate support alongside a recruitment process that can allow people to successfully integrate into workforces around the world, Mr. Ban continued.

The UN General Assembly unanimously declared 2 April World Autism Awareness Day to highlight the need to help improve the quality of life of children and adults, who are affected by autism, so they can lead full and meaningful lives.

In that text, the Assembly called for training for public administrators, service providers, care-givers, families and non-professionals to support the integration of persons with autism into society, so that they can realize their full potential.

Today's event, which will focus on measures required to support growth in employment opportunities for people on the autism spectrum, will feature opening remarks by Mr. Ban as well as the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information (DPI), Cristina Gallach. Joining them in the day-long discussion are members of academia, finance, small businesses as well as country representatives to the United Nations.

**Security Council authorizes further downsizing of UN peacekeeping force in Liberia**

UN peacekeepers in Liberia. Photo: UNMIL/Staton Winter

2 April - The United Nations Security Council today adopted a resolution authorizing the third phase of a drawdown of the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia to 3,590 military personnel and 1,515 police personnel, and deciding that the Mission’s mandate would no longer include electoral support.

The text reaffirms the Council’s expectation that the Government of Liberia will assume fully its complete security responsibilities from the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) no later than 30 June 2016 and also reaffirms its intention to consider the continued and future reconfiguration of UNMIL accordingly.

Council members requested that the Secretary-General streamline the civilian element of UNMIL’s activities to fully reflect the downsizing of the police and military components and the narrowing of the mandate decided in resolution 2190 (2014), and to consolidate the three elements of the Mission in line with the security transition.

Calling on the Governments of Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire to continue reinforcing their cooperation, particularly with respect to the border area, the resolution calls upon all UN entities in Côte d’Ivoire and Liberia, including the UN Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI) and UNMIL, to support the Ivoirian and Liberian authorities in doing so.

It also reaffirms the importance of inter-mission cooperation arrangements as downsizing of UNOCI and UNMIL proceeds.
Thailand: UN rights chief warns against Government’s ‘draconian’ powers

2 April - The top United Nations human rights official has expressed alarm at the Government of Thailand’s decision to bestow wide-ranging powers upon General Prayuth Chan-ocha – the leader of the military coup that deposed Thailand’s elected Government in 2014 and, currently, the country’s Prime Minister.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), on 1 April, the Thai military Government was granted permission to revoke martial law and replace it with extraordinary powers under article 44 of the country’s Interim Constitution.

“Normally, I would welcome the lifting of martial law – and indeed strongly advocated for it to be lifted in Thailand,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a news release.

“But I am alarmed at the decision to replace martial law with something even more draconian, which bestows unlimited power on the current Prime Minister without any judicial oversight at all. This clearly leaves the door wide open to serious violations of fundamental human rights.”

The new powers grant military personnel down to the rank of Second Lieutenant the ability to be appointed as so-called peace and maintenance officers with sweeping law enforcement powers, including to search, arrest and detain without judicial oversight. In addition, they are empowered to conduct any other action as determined by the National Council of Peace and Order (NCPO).

In the news release, OHCHR explained that Article 44 effectively allows the head of the NCPO, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, to issue “any legislative, executive or judicial order.” For his part, Mr. Zeid voiced unease that the NCPO order also “annihilates freedom of expression” – a concern reiterated yesterday by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, David Kaye.

“It explicitly gives these military peace and order maintenance officers the authority to prohibit ‘the reporting of news’ or sale or distribution of books, publications, or any other medium that ‘may create public fear or are intended to distort news and information to cause misunderstandings which could affect national security or public order,’” the UN rights chief continued.

“Freedom of assembly also remains severely curtailed, with heavy punishment earmarked for protesters who gather in groups of more than five.”

“I urge the Thai Government to comply with its obligations under international human rights law and promptly restore normal civilian rule of law, as it pledged to do after the coup in May last year,” he concluded.