South Sudan at critical juncture, UN peacekeeping chief warns; calls for more ‘blue helmets’

2 December - With the both sides repeatedly violating the ceasefire, endangering progress so far made towards a political transition, the South Sudan peace process is at a critical juncture and in need of increased international support, the top United Nations peacekeeping official warned today.

“Now is the time for the [UN Security] Council and international partners of the ‘IGAD Plus’ to invest politically in supporting the take-off of the transition, or the progress made could be lost,” Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous told the Council, calling for 1,100 additional UN peacekeepers to help monitor the accords.

IGAD Plus, representing the East African Intergovernmental Authority on Development and its partners, including the African Union, the UN, China, Norway, United Kingdom and United States, sponsored the peace agreement which President Salva Kiir and his former Vice-President Riek Machar signed in August to end the bloody conflict that erupted between their factions two years ago.

“We must work collectively on increasing the buy-in of the parties to the implementation of their Agreement, and actively support the institutions it has provided to put an end to this senseless conflict.” Mr. Ladsous said, stressing that the violations have led to significant civilian deaths and displacement and detailing steps needed to set up the Transitional Government of National Unity.

“As expected, the implementation of the peace Agreement is progressing slowly and with serious difficulties” he underscored.

The ongoing clashes, accompanied by increased cattle raids, looting of relief aid and human rights violations, have exacerbated humanitarian needs as each side tries to improve its military standing or regain positions lost before the
beginning of the transition, he noted.

Political actions, moreover, such as the National Legislative Assembly’s recent approval of an amendment allowing the president to appoint governors and State Legislative Assembly members in the transition, could make reconciliation between the parties even more challenging.

“At this point of the peace process, any unilateral political initiative taken by either party is counter-productive. Our messaging to both parties should be clear and unequivocal: we need the Agreement, the whole Agreement and nothing but the Agreement, and we need it urgently,” Mr. Ladsous stressed.

He called for an increase of 500 troops and 600 police personnel for the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), which already has some 12,500 ‘blue helmet’ uniformed personnel on the ground, to support the monitoring mechanisms envisioned by the accords and provide increased protection for civilians both inside and outside displacement camps.

Last month, UNMISS Deputy Police Commissioner Charles Bent told the Council of the “constant, daily threats” in trying to maintain order in the so-called Protection of Civilian (POC) sites, where populations have ballooned to 180,000 over the past two years.

“Increasing protection outside of the POC sites fundamentally requires the cooperation of the Government, as well as that of UNMISS’s troop contributing countries, who have at times proven reluctant to undertake the proactive and forward-leaning posture required of the task,” Mr. Ladsous said.

“As the mission moves towards the provision of more robust support to the national authorities in the implementation of the peace agreement, it will be essential for the Government of National Unity to prove itself a willing partner.

“It must make the strategic decision to support and facilitate, rather than simply tolerate, the work of UNMISS,” he added, calling for an end to restrictions on the peacekeepers’ freedom of movement.

UNMISS also must help set up the Joint Integrated Police, Joint Operations Centre and joint military command in Juba, the capital, to help the parties work together to rebuild confidence and maintain security, and Mr. Ladsous called for a year’s extension of the Mission’s mandate to fulfil all these tasks.

Yemen faces dire health crisis with major funding gap and 15.2 million lacking care, UN warns

2 December - More than 15.2 million Yemenis now lack access to health care services, well over half the war-torn country’s total population, yet there is a major 55 per cent gap in requested international funding to address the crisis, according to the United Nations health agency.

“The intensification of conflict in Yemen since March 2015 has pushed Yemen’s already weakened health system to the brink of collapse,” the UN World Health Organization (WHO) says in its latest update, appealing to the international community to step up its donations and warning that the crisis has not yet peaked.

“Insecurity, power shortages and a lack of fuel (for generators and ambulances) have led to the closure of almost one in four health facilities. Not only are health workers among the 2.3 million people displaced, but the procurement and distribution of medicines and medical supplies has been disrupted.

“In addition, economic factors are taking a toll on the Ministry of Health’s ability to fund the continued operation of health facilities and individuals’ ability to pay to access them. As a result, 15.2 million people currently lack access to health care and the conflict looks unlikely to abate any time soon.”

The WHO needs $83 million to address Yemen’s health care crisis but has so far received only $37 million.

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Since the outbreak of violence in 2014, the UN has been working with the Yemeni parties, regional countries and Member States in efforts to achieve a ceasefire and a resumption of a political transition towards a peaceful, stable and democratic country – so far in vain.

“Health services in Yemen are at their breaking point. Unless the health system receives sufficient support, immediately, it could collapse completely,” WHO warns, calling on Member States to provide additional funding, deploy medical teams and advocate for the protection of health workers and facilities and for the unrestricted delivery of medical supplies.

“The crisis has not reached its peak,” it stresses. “There is no political solution to the current conflict in sight. And, with 20 million people lacking access to safe water and sanitation, conditions are ripe for a major disease outbreak.”

The agency is working to support Yemen’s Health Ministry in coordinating the efforts of 22 partner agencies to meet the needs of people affected by the ongoing conflict, aiming to reach 10.3 million of the country’s most vulnerable people.

Treatment for conflict-related injuries is an immediate concern, but other health needs are mounting, including increasing difficulties in accessing care for chronic non-communicable conditions such as cancer, diabetes and high blood pressure.

While some of these conditions are easily treatable under normal circumstances, if left untreated, the consequences can be deadly. Non-communicable diseases account for 39 per cent of all deaths in Yemen.

Women and children are particularly vulnerable, with over 500,000 children suffering from life-threatening malnutrition and becoming increasingly susceptible to communicable diseases like measles and polio.

For the past 10 months, WHO has been almost the only provider of medicines and medical supplies, distributing 300 tonnes of life-saving goods to the Ministry of Health, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

It has conducted fumigation campaigns to protect 250,000 people from dengue fever, provided intravenous (IV) fluids to treat 300,000 people, supported 71 health facilities with medicines, medical supplies and equipment, and delivered 119,000 litres of fuel to maintain uninterrupted services in hospitals and health facilities and support ambulance services.

WHO has also procured nutritional supplements and paediatric medicines for therapeutic feeding centres and supported improvements to water and sanitation infrastructure at health facilities, including the delivery of more than 300,000 water purification tablets between August and October.

**COP21: on 'Resilience Day,' UN and partners launch initiatives to protect millions of people**

2 December - On the third day of the United Nations climate change conference (COP21), dubbed 'Resilience Day,' the UN and the Governments of Peru and France have announced major international partnerships that are mobilizing large-scale financing to protect people who are most vulnerable to climate impacts.

These initiatives are taking place under the Lima to Paris Action Agenda (LPAA), launched one year ago at the previous climate change conference in Peru, and aims to strength climate action beyond COP21.

“Resilience is really important because the climate is already changing, and we need to be able to not just adapt to the changes but actually develop in a way that takes into account that in the future, climate will still change,” Janos Pasztor, the UN Assistant Secretary-General on Climate Change, told the UN News Service in an interview at the conference site in Paris.

“Even if we stop all the emissions today, there are already enough greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that the climate will continue to change,” he continued. “So we need to adjust our development process, adjust our economic approach […] and be more resilient to future changes that will happen.”
Bold announcements were made at COP21 today, which was dedicated to building more resilient societies and economies. According to the UN, extreme climate already impacts hundreds of millions of people every year, undermining or destroying their livelihoods, their homes and their environment.

The Rockefeller Foundation estimates that over the last 30 years, one dollar out of every three spent on development has been lost as a result of such recurring crises, a total loss of $3.8 trillion dollars worldwide. In contrast, resilient societies and economies suffer less and recover more quickly from such natural disasters.

“Resilience–it is very important when we talk about climate change and its consequences,” Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, Peru's Minister of the Environment, told the UN News Service.

“When we talk about resilience, we are talking about how can we resist […] and avoid negative consequences to our human population,” he explained. “To the wildlife, to the habitat, to the ecosystems, to the water, to the ocean–that is why we have the 'Resilience Day.' If climate change is going to bring us natural disasters, we should have the objective of resilience as a way to face those kinds of consequences.”

Meanwhile, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) today launched a new 'Climate Risk Early Warning System,' (CREWS), while the governments of Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands agreed to give more than $80 million dollars to equip up to 80 countries with better systems to support countries most vulnerable to climate disasters.

The plan was first proposed in March by France's Minister of Foreign Affairs Laurent Fabius at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan.

“Climate related disasters cause human losses and dramatic economic losses each year,” said France's Secretary of State for Development Annick Girardin.

“We will first help the most exposed countries among [Least Developed Countries] and Small Island States which will be most at risk as the frequency and severity of such hazards are expected to increase in this part of the world,” she added.

News from COP21 also included the announcement from a broad coalition of nations, river basin organizations, businesses and civil society groups of the creation of the international Paris Pact on Water and Climate Change Adaptation to make water systems – considered the very foundation of sustainable human development–more resilient to climate impacts.

Almost 290 water basin organizations are reportedly engaged under this new Pact. They say without improved water resources management, the progress towards poverty reduction targets, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and sustainable development in all its economic, social and environmental dimensions, will be jeopardized.

According to a press release issued by the main actors of the LPAA, many other initiatives launched on 'Resilience Day' covered the “full spread of peoples' needs” as they face increasing climate impacts.”
On Slavery Abolition Day, Ban warns of enslavement, trafficking risks for refugees, migrants

2 December - With over 60 million people driven from their homes and millions more crossing borders to seek a better life, the risk of mounting human trafficking and enslavement with all its “horrific abuse” must be confronted, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned today.

“Slavery has many modern forms, from the children toiling as domestic servants, farmhands and factory workers, to the bonded labourers struggling to pay off ever-mounting debts, to the victims of sex trafficking who endure horrific abuse,” he said in a message marking the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery.

Although statistics about these crimes are difficult to compile, experts estimate that nearly 21 million people are enslaved in our world today. We have a responsibility to them – and to all those at risk – to end this outrage,” he stressed.

“This is all the more important in our era of severe humanitarian crises. More than 60 million people have been driven from their homes. They may be at risk of trafficking and enslavement – along with millions of others crossing borders in search of a better life,” the UN chief explained.

The Day marks the General Assembly’s adoption on 2 December 1949 of the UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.

Mr. Ban noted that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by world leaders at a UN summit in September offers a framework to fundamentally alter conditions fuelling poverty, specifically setting the goals of eradicating forced labour and human trafficking and ending all forms of modern slavery and child labour.

“As we strive to achieve these targets, we must also rehabilitate freed victims and help them integrate into society,” he said, noting that the UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery has for over two decades extended humanitarian, financial and legal aid to tens of thousands of victims worldwide, making a meaningful difference in their lives.

“I urge Member States, businesses, private foundations and other donors to demonstrate their commitment to ending slavery by ensuring that this Fund has the resources to fulfil its mandate,” concluded the Secretary-General.

At the same time, International Labour Organization (ILO) Executive Director, Guy Ryder called on governments to ratify ILO’s Forced Labour Protocol to make a real change in the lives of the 21 million people worldwide who are trapped in modern slavery.

“Slavery is a fundamental abuse of human rights and a major obstacle to social justice. It is an affront to our humanity and it has no place in the twenty-first century. And yet 21 million women, men and children are still trapped in forced labour all over the world, generating USD 150 billion in illicit profits for those who exploit them,” said Mr. Ryder in a message, marking the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery.

Mr. Ryder observed that each day men, women and children are “tricked or coerced into abhorrent situations including bonded labour, prostitution and exploitative domestic work”.

He also noted that while global commitment to end modern slavery has gained momentum, the current responses still fall short of addressing the entirety of the challenge or its root causes.

“Ending modern slavery requires strong legislation, strict implementation, joint commitment of countries and social
partners, along with effective support systems for the victims. Effective measures on prevention, protection and access to justice are exactly what the ILO Forced Labour Protocol adopted by our Conference last year addresses,” said Mr. Ryder.

The ILO chief called on the governments, who “overwhelmingly” voted for the Protocol, to ratify and implement it.

Further, Mr. Ryder said that African countries have been leading the progress with Niger being the first country to ratify the Protocol and countries of the Southern African Development Community all calling for immediate ratification.

He also added that the second ratification by Norway in November will enter into force in one year's time.

“If fully implemented, the Protocol's provisions on remedies and compensation will not only provide justice to the many victims of forced labour - through damages and unpaid wages won back from perpetrators, it will also make it less profitable to use forced labour and help to combat unfair competition,” said Mr. Ryder.

Additionally, he also underscored the activities undertaken to help eliminating modern slavery, such as the 50 for Freedom campaign, which sets a target of 50 ratifications of the Protocol by 2018.

Speaking about the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 8 of the Agenda 2030, on promoting Decent Work and inclusive and sustainable growth, Mr. Ryder stressed that to achieve social justice forced labour must be eliminated and that “it is not negotiable”.

“To make a real change in the lives of the 21 million men, women and children in forced labour - let's not just be angry at slavery, let's make change happen,” concluded Mr. Ryder.

**UN seeks to enlist citizens of world as foot soldiers in war on hate speech**

2 December - The United Nations today launched a campaign against hate speech, with senior officials calling for a global mobilization of citizens as foot soldiers in the battle to uproot a scourge that seeks to unleash a clash of civilizations in the name of religion.

“Hate speech has been with us for a long time,” UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Cristina Gallach told a symposium on the issue at UN Headquarters in New York, urging citizens worldwide who encounter hate speech on social media to forcefully counter it.

“We will never forget the slaughter of over 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus during a brief three month period in Rwanda in 1994. We will never forget either the six million Jews plus five million others who perished because of one hateful vision,” she said.

“Today, however, more than ever, individuals are using hate speech to foment clashes between civilizations in the name of religion. Their goal is to radicalize young boys and girls, to get them to see the world in black and white, good versus evil, and get them to embrace a path of violence as the only way forward.”

Both Ms. Gallach and Nassir Abdulaziz Al–Nasser, High Representative for the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), the symposium’s host, stressed that the “loudspeakers for hate” have been amplified exponentially with the explosion of new means of communication beyond the traditional media, with Facebook and Twitter providing immediate worldwide access.

“We have a big problem on our hands,” Ms. Gallach said. “The world has witnessed this very recently in Paris, where, at last count, 130 people have died at the hands of nine young men who heeded the [Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL] call for violence and succumbed to hate speech.”

She called for passage and enforcement of laws prohibiting incitement of hatred or violence, and the use of communications
to establish a counter-message.

“We must monitor social media and quickly respond to hate speech,” Ms. Gallach stressed. “Of course, in an age when Facebook has over 1.5 billion monthly active users, or Twitter has over 300 million users, monitoring might be almost an impossible task, but we can achieve this with the involvement of citizens of the world, who are going to be our crucial partners in combatting hate speech.”

Underscoring that the battle is a collective responsibility, not only for Member States, but for everyone, including the media, she highlighted corporations as crucial partners with the task of deleting content inciting violence or hatred.

Mr. Al-Nasser also noted the role played by new media. “We see how radical groups have hijacked these new media platforms and used [them] as an advocacy tool for their extremist ideologies, and inciting violence and hatred,” he said.

“In doing so, they have assaulted not only individuals, but also global values representing the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On the other hand, we see those who also use information technology to re-inforce stereotypes, stigmatization and demonization against certain race, faith, or sexual orientation.

“That being said, our next goal should be winning the battle of ideas,” he stressed, citing the use of hate speech against migrants and minority communities blaming them for a nation’s problems.

Today’s symposium was the first of a series on Tracking Hatred that UNAOC will be hosting to identify best practices by engaging global media and journalists, especially those who well positioned to investigate xenophobia, violent extremism and prejudice.

The next symposium will be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in April.

**New UN report warns of ‘abhorrent violations’ against children in war-torn Iraq**

2 December - Boys and girls in war-weary Iraq are suffering from grave violations with “dramatic consequences,” according to the latest report from United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on children and armed conflict in the country.

“I condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the continuous grave violations committed against children in armed conflict,” Mr. Ban said in his second report on the subject, and he especially deplored the abhorrent violations against the rights of children committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity.

The volatile security situation and limited access to affected populations, in particular throughout 2014 and the first half of 2015, significantly hindered monitoring and reporting activities, but the document nonetheless highlights “worsening trends” as regards the killing and maiming, recruitment of child soldiers, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.

Among the other grim realities that children are facing in Iraq, the report also reveals that some 1,400 boys and girls had been abducted during the reporting period, from 1 January 2011 to 30 June 2015.

“The Government of Iraq faces tremendous challenges to protect the country’s children, who urgently need to be shielded from this brutal conflict,” said Leila Zerrougui, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

Extremely concerned by the high number of more than 3,000 child casualties, Ms. Zerrougui warned that extreme violence by Al-Qaeda and ISIL, such as the use of improvised explosive devices, attributed to over half of documented incidents.
Another grave concern, stressed the report, is the recruitment and use of children by armed groups such as ISIL’s “youth wings” in Iraq.

“I call on the Government to take robust action to address the recruitment and use of children by all parties to the conflict,” Ms. Zerrougui said, also stressing that detention of children “should be used as a last resort and for the shortest period of time.”

Echoing Mr. Ban’s call to the Iraqi Government for independent and prompt investigations into grave violations against children, Ms. Zerrougui said that she hoped such action would ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

She said she was encouraged by Prime Minister al-Abadi’s reforms aimed at strengthening the rule of law, enhancing accountability and addressing widespread impunity.

Meanwhile, the UN chief in his report welcomed donors' support for child protection in Iraq and urged for their additional financial contributions.

As massive El Niño strengthens, UN emergency fund supports millions in affected countries

2 December - Following the devastating impact of El Niño, the United Nations relief wing has announced that the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has provided some $76 million for life-saving activities in response to drought, drought-like conditions, floods and related insecurity, and other disasters in East Africa, Southern Africa, the Pacific Islands, South East Asia and Central America throughout 2015.

According to a news release issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the climatic event El Niño has impacted millions of people across the globe throughout 2015, and they will continue to be at risk of extreme weather, including below-normal rains in some areas and flooding in others, in early 2016.

OCHA said that the humanitarian fallout in certain areas will include increased food insecurity due to low crop yields and rising prices; higher malnutrition rates; devastated livelihoods; and forced displacement.

According to the news release, the CERF has been one of the quickest and largest supporters of early humanitarian response to climate-related events linked to El Niño.

As of today, CERF has provided relief funding for: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea ($6.3 million), El Salvador ($3 million), Eritrea ($2.5 million), Ethiopia ($25.5 million), Haiti ($3 million), Honduras ($2.3 million), Malawi ($9.9 million), Myanmar ($10.5 million), Somalia ($4.9 million) and Zimbabwe ($8.1 million).

UN Middle East envoy calls for swift action on unresolved West Bank arson attack case

2 December - Four months after the arson attack against the Dawabsha family in the village of Duma in the West Bank, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, today expressed concern at the slow progress on the case and called on the Israeli authorities to “move swiftly in bringing the perpetrators of this terrible crime to justice.”

“The brutal killing of toddler Ali, and his parents Reham and Sa’ad was a tragedy that has angered Palestinians and shocked Israelis,” said Mr. Mladenov in a statement issued by the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO).
He added the only surviving member of the family, four-year-old Ahmed, is still being treated for his wounds at the Sheba Medical Center.

Mr. Mladenov noted that the incident, which was widely condemned by leaders on all sides, regrettably, has still not been resolved.

“Amidst the current escalation of violence, it is essential that all firmly and consistently reject terrorism and act decisively to stop hatred and incitement,” the statement concluded.

**Ban calls for international aid for African communities attacked by Boko Haram**

2 December - United Nations Secretary-General today called on the international community to provide urgent support for humanitarian aid to communities hit by the Nigerian-based Boko Haram, deploiring its latest “appalling” attacks in Cameroon.

“The Secretary-General reaffirms his solidarity with the people of Cameroon and reiterates the United Nations support for the Government of Cameroon in its fight against terrorism, conducted in full respect of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law,” a statement issued by his spokesman said of the attacks on Dabanga and Waza, which killed some 15 people and wounded many others.

“These are the latest in an appalling series of attacks by Boko Haram elements on the civilian population of the region,” it added.

“He calls on the international community to provide urgent support for humanitarian assistance and early recovery as a way to mitigate the impact on the affected populations. The Secretary-General encourages the Governments affected by Boko Haram to address the root causes of the insurgency in a holistic and integrated manner.”

He called on the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to hold the planned Summit of Heads of State and Government on countering the Boko Haram threat without further delay.