Ban greatly concerned over ongoing deterioration of security in post-election Burundi

3 August - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today voiced concern over the situation in Burundi, where the security situation continues to worsen following the recent elections, and strongly condemned the assassination yesterday of General Adolphe Nshimirimana.

A statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson said the UN chief “notes with great concern the continuing deterioration of the security environment in Burundi following an electoral period marked by violence and the violation of human rights, including the right to life.”

In the wake of yesterday’s assassination, the Secretary-General welcomed President Pierre Nkurunziza’s message to the nation to remain calm and to the competent authorities to expeditiously investigate and bring the perpetrators to justice.

“The Secretary-General renews his appeal to all Burundians to resume an inclusive dialogue without delay and peacefully settle their differences under the facilitation of President Museveni as mandated by the East African Community,” the statement added.

The UN Electoral Observation Mission in Burundi (MENUB) last week stated that while the 21 July election in Burundi that won Mr. Nkurunziza a controversial third term was relatively peaceful and conducted adequately, the overall environment was ‘not conducive’ for an inclusive, free and credible electoral process.

The polls took place after two postponements in an environment of “profound mistrust” between opposing political camps, the Mission noted, adding that the decision of the incumbent President to run for another term precipitated a deep political and socioeconomic crisis.
Member States lauded for reaching agreement on new UN sustainable development agenda

3 August - Member States answered the call to make 2015 a year of global action by agreeing on a “bold, ambitious and transformative” sustainable development agenda for the next 15 years, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.

The agreement reached by Member States last night – “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” – marks the culmination of efforts that began three years ago with the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. The new agenda expands on the success of the Millennium Development Goals, which had a target date of 2015, and contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

“They address the requirements for all humanity to be able to live decent lives free from poverty, hunger and inequality, with all men and women, girls and boys able to develop their full potential,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told a news conference in New York. “They commit all of us to be responsible global citizens, caring for the less fortunate as well as for our planet’s ecosystems and climate action on which all life depends.

“We have a big, bold agenda before us – now we must work to make it real in people’s lives.”

Mr. Ban hailed the leadership of Sam Kutesa, the President of the General Assembly, and the contribution of representatives from civil society, the private sector, academia, parliamentarians and “millions of people in every corner of the world who shared their vision of the world we want.”

Joining him at the press conference were Amina Mohammed, his Special Advisor for Post-2015 Development Planning, and Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, as well as the two co-facilitators of the negotiations, Ambassador David Donoghue of Ireland and Ambassador Macharia Kamau of Kenya.

“This is truly a ‘We the Peoples’ Agenda,” Mr. Ban said of the Sustainable Development Goals, which he likened to a “to-do” list for people and the planet.

“They are people-centred and planet-sensitive. They are universal – applying to all countries while recognizing different realities and capabilities.”

Next month world leaders will formally approve the new sustainable development agenda at a summit held at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Then in Paris at the end of the year, they will seek to adopt an ambitious universal climate change agreement.

“We can be the first generation that ends global poverty, and the last generation to prevent the worst impacts of global warming before it is too late,” Mr. Ban stated. “The international community took a major step towards achieving this shared goal with this weekend’s agreement. Now we must sustain that momentum.”

In a statement issued today, General Assembly President Sam Kutesa welcoming the consensus reached on the outcome document, adding that “this transformative agenda will open a new chapter in development history.”

He looked forward to the adoption of the new agenda by world leaders at the summit to be held from 25 to 27 September in New York. “As the United Nations celebrates its 70th anniversary, we are setting our world on a sustainable course, one that will ensure a better future for our planet and all its inhabitants,” he added.
'Catastrophic' floods in Myanmar hit most vulnerable, including children – UN agencies

3 August - Myanmar has suffered heavy rains, winds and flooding since Cyclone Komen made landfall in Bangladesh on 30 July, causing landslides and damage in different parts of the country, according to United Nations agencies.

“The floods are hitting children and families who are already very vulnerable, including those living in camps in Rakhine state,” said Shalini Bahuguna, from the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF). There are 140,000 displaced children and families in Rakhine alone.

“Beyond the immediate impact, the floods will have a longer term impact on the livelihoods of these families,” she warned.

According to the Myanmar Government, 39 people have died and over 200,000 people across the country are in need of lifesaving assistance. Twelve out of Myanmar's 14 states and regions have been affected by the rains. On 31 July, President U Thein Sein issued a statement declaring natural disaster zones in four regions, including Rakhine, where access is limited due to flooding, road blockages and landslides.

“Initial reports indicate that there is extensive damage to shelters and other infrastructure in camps around Sittwe [Rakhine's capital], where some 100,000 displaced people are staying,” stressed the UN Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in an update from 30 July.

Limited information is available this stage on the situation in Magway region and Chin state. In one township alone in Magway, around 70 villages are reported to be affected by floods and people in the area being relocated to schools, monasteries and other safe locations. In Chin state, at least 100 houses reported have been destroyed by landslides, pointed out OCHA.

Local authorities, the Government, the military, as well as the Myanmar Red Cross Society and local civil society organizations, with support from the UN and international organizations, are responding to the floods in different parts of the country, carrying out rescue operations and providing food, water, blankets, medical and other basic necessities to those affected.

Against that background, vulnerable children in Myanmar, UNICEF says, face a “double catastrophe” as floods add to the hardships of poverty, violence and conflict.

UNICEF is working closely with other UN agencies is working closely with the Myanmar authorities, dispatching assessment teams to affected areas to identify the priority needs of children and families in terms of water and sanitation, health care, and nutrition.

“UNICEF has already supported the distribution of water purification tablets and hygiene kits to the affected areas,” Ms. Bahuguna said. “We are working…to get emergency messages out to local communities through radio, to tell people how to prevent water borne diseases.”

Myanmar is prone to natural disasters such as floods, cyclones and earthquakes. There is a need for more resources to scale up disaster preparedness, and to improve community resilience. The heaviest affected areas are among the poorest states in Myanmar, a country where nearly 70 percent of people live close to the $2-per-day poverty threshold, and children make up 34 per cent of the population.

Earlier this year, UNICEF appealed for $24.9 million to help children affected by violence and conflict in Rakhine state. The agency has received $5.6 million so far, leaving a $19.3 million shortfall, even before the needs of flood-affected families are taken into account.
“The impact of these floods makes the need for funding, particularly for displaced and vulnerable families, even more urgent,” Ms. Bahuguna said. “The poorest children and families are going to be the hardest hit, and we need to build their resilience so they can cope with these kinds of crises.”

**UN chief welcomes climate change plan unveiled by President Obama**

**3 August** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the Clean Power Plan formally unveiled today by President Barack Obama, saying it shows the determination of the United States to address global warming while also saving money and growing the economy.

The Plan reportedly assigns each state a target for reducing its carbon pollution from power plants. States will be allowed to create their own plans to meet the requirements and will have to submit initial versions of their plans by 2016 and final versions by 2018.

It aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions from US power stations by nearly a third within 15 years, and emphasizes wind and solar power and other renewable energy sources.

“The Plan is an example of the visionary leadership necessary to reduce emissions and to tackle climate change,” Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, told reporters in New York.

“The Secretary-General appreciates President Obama's strong, personal leadership on climate change,” he added. “President Obama's leadership by example is essential for bringing other key countries on board and securing a universal, durable and meaningful agreement in Paris in December.”

Mr. Ban will travel to Washington, D.C. tomorrow to meet with Mr. Obama on a range of issues.

**INTERVIEW: The toughest spokesperson's job in the world? A decade speaking out for Palestinian humanitarian needs**

**3 August** - Chris Gunness has served as the Spokesperson and Director of Advocacy and Communications for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for almost a decade.

His Twitter account is carefully watched. His every word is deconstructed and parsed for nuance and intent. He is indefatigable in his passion for advocacy – and his cause, quite simply – is the five million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East who are the responsibility of UNRWA. A regular voice in media coverage of the Palestine conflict, Mr. Gunness has been reviled and revered for his dogged commitment to easing their plight.

Based in Jerusalem but covering UNRWA operations in the surrounding region, he has lived and worked through five wars – three in Gaza, one in Lebanon and another in Syria – in addition to many other moments of extreme tension and violence as the international community works towards bringing peace to the Middle East.

Mr. Gunness came to the United Nations through his previous work as a journalist with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), where he worked for 25 years. A term as the BBC correspondent in the press corps at UN Headquarters exposed him to the UN system, which led to a stint with the UN Protection Force in the Balkans. Soon after, while working back at the BBC, the loss of his partner added to his desire for a change. Not long afterwards, he landed work with the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) in Jerusalem from where he took up the job as UNRWA’s point person for strategic communications and advocacy. He has been there
ever since.

With the Syrian conflict in its fifth year, Mr. Gunness never loses an opportunity to remind the world of what makes headlines fleetingly and then recedes. The besieged Palestinians of Yarmouk, a suburb of Damascus, took over television screens around the world, as aid was finally allowed in – and a now staggering but iconic photograph that UNRWA circulated captured how civilians are the ultimate pawns in the chess-game of politics.

However, last year he went from feeding the news cycle to becoming a headline when a video clip of him in an emotional state after a TV interview during the last Gaza war went viral.

I don’t think anyone really expects humanitarian workers not to be affected. I think quite the reverse, I think people would think you’re kind of weird if you went through these experiences and behaved as if you were going to an office every day and being an accountant.

The UN News Centre spoke with Mr. Gunness about the challenges UNRWA faces in 2015, his experiences on the frontlines of one of the world’s most contentious issues in international relations, and becoming the subject of a viral video.

UN News Centre: You have been in the “hot seat” at UNRWA for almost a decade now. What were your expectations when you first joined the Agency?

Chris Gunness: I knew it was probably the toughest UN spokesman job on the planet – but I didn’t know exactly how tough it was going to be, because the job really is a lightning rod for a lot of the totally understandable anger that is felt about the UN in general – not just UNRWA -- on the Israeli side and the Palestinian side.

On the Israeli side there’s a feeling that we only work with the Palestinians, that we do all this advocacy for the Palestinians; but that’s what the General Assembly has mandated us to do and that’s what we do as best we can. On the Palestinian side there’s a lot of anger with what we’re about – and again, I’m a lightning rod for that – because they’ve been denied a just and durable solution. They’ve been denied their political rights and huge injustices are perpetrated against the Palestinians, and the UN has, frankly, been unable to do much about it.

Look at Syria or the conflict last summer in Gaza: massive denial of human rights and dignity. UNRWA is on the frontline of all that literally and we’re the nearest thing that the Palestinians and Israelis have that represents the international community and I’m perhaps the most public face of this, so I’m the one that is, like I say, a lightning rod.

UN News Centre: How do you negotiate those “lightning strikes”?

Chris Gunness: We have a great Commissioner-General, a man who is principled and believes in public advocacy done in the right way. We do it in a way which contains as much controversy as we can, based on international law, on our mandate and on humanitarian principles. The thing about controversy is that you often don’t end up having a conversation about the thing you want to have a conversation about. So you begin by talking about rights abuses, about protection, and then you suddenly get into a debate about are you Orientalist or an anti-Semite.

One tries to limit as much as possible all the surrounding noise around the issue by being actually very perspicacious and judicious in the way we approach public messaging; so we all do what we can to contain and to limit the political fallout from what we say.

But the fact is that we work, I work, in a highly combustible political atmosphere. At any moment, there are these explosions – literal and metaphoric – that take place and so we have to look forward, we have to predict and we have to take as many precautionary measures as we can.

UN News Centre: How do you cope with that pressure?

Chris Gunness: I would be lying if I tried to pretend that there was no stress and that it didn’t take a toll, because for me it’s
a very human experience. I think that being a UN spokesman is about having a humanity yourself – that doesn’t mean that you yourself become the story – I think it’s about being what the UN stands for and embodying the UN values of compassion, of humanity, of dignity, of all of those things, and at the same time trying to be eloquent and expressive.

And I think just being a sort of uptight UN spokesman in an Armani suit really puts a distance between the UN and the world that we’re serving. So I don’t wear suits very often, I don’t wear ties very often. But I am bound by all the internal staff rules, I’m hemmed in by the politics of the conflict, I’m bound by the policies of the Security Council, and all those other dynamics.

But, within that, I think it’s important to find as much space to be human because that is what the world has to recognize, I think, in the UN – it’s essentially a very human and humane institution and it’s our job, I think, to project that and to live it and to be it. That’s important.

**UN News Centre: What are the biggest challenges for UNRWA this year?**

**Chris Gunness:** Dealing with UNRWA’s $101 million deficit is by far the biggest challenge. If we don’t bring in all the money soon then we are looking at a tough decision which might involve not opening our schools at the start of the upcoming academic year. It would be a devastating blow for an agency whose largest programme is education. And having 500,000 kids who we should be educating potentially on the streets at a time of rising extremism across the Middle East is an alarming prospect. It’s also going to be a very interesting year in the Israel-Palestine conflict, because I think, post-Oslo, what we’ve seen is the slow erosion of the peace process and that makes the humanitarian work we do all the more important.

The lack of a just and durable solution, the lack of any sense of real justice for the Palestine refugees, is going to make the advocacy we do and the work we do at UNRWA and our critical human development work all the more important. With that is likely to come political and rhetorical attacks on UNRWA based on the nonsensical idea that we perpetuate the Middle East conflict – which, of course, we don’t. The reason UNRWA exists, as I have said many times is political failure. We are mandated to do our humanitarian work until there is a just and lasting solution for the refugees. While the world fails to find such a solution we will continue to exist. To be clear, UNRWA wants nothing more than to go away, but that happens once the parties to the conflict resolve the refugee issue, based on international law and UN resolutions.

**UN News Centre: How has the Syria crisis affected UNRWA’s ability to do its work?**

**Chris Gunness:** The Syria crisis was really quite unexpected and four years ago completely engulfed us. I keep saying to people that what UNWRA should be doing is human development, running schools and health clinics. But every time we try and get on with that a crisis happens. The Gaza conflict happens again, or the Syria war breaks out, and UNRWA has to move into emergency mode, which it does very well, by the way.

The Syria crisis was another example of where the lack of a political solution and the failure of politics has given UNRWA an enormous workload, and that’s why we’re doing all the emergency work we’re doing in Syria. We’re very badly funded and therefore the refugees are not getting the help they need. For example last year we distributed less than 60 cents per refugee per day in Syria – well, that’s not enough. So many of our facilities have been destroyed and damaged and there’s no access to them, thus cash is a big part of our humanitarian response and yet we have no money for it.

**UN News Centre: Can you tell us, from what you have seen, about the toll the violence takes?**

**Chris Gunness:** I’ve been working for UNWRA during three wars in Gaza, the war in Lebanon, the war in Syria – those are five hugely disruptive conflicts. Of course, the physical toll is enormous.

When I first went to Gaza after the last war it looked like an earthquake, like Nepal, had just struck it except that this was manmade, this was not natural. I’ve been in Gaza when there have been sonic booms, where planes fly low and it’s really terrifying and awful, especially if you’re a baby or a child. There’ve been explosions and I’ve been in Gaza when there have been upsurges in violence.
But generally I think to be in a conflict zone means there’s always this potential for violence. In the Palestinian context, there’s always a low-level, low-intensity conflict. In Lebanon, you’ll be driving down the street and suddenly there’ll be a tank parked in the middle of a roundabout or you’re in the West Bank and suddenly there’s an incursion and there’s tear gas; but that, I think, is part of the job. I think you have to be used to the unpredictable and you have to be able to respond to it, I think, in a way that is rational and human.

UN News Centre: Your work takes you from the relative safety of Jerusalem to the hardship and suffering in places like Gaza – how do you adjust to the differences in such locations?

Chris Gunness: I have to say that the juxtaposition that you talk about for me is a constant reminder of what the Palestinians don’t have and rather than making me inured to the violence and the injustice, it actually sharpens the experience for me and heightens the need for compassion and to humanize the story.

When I go to Gaza and see the human impact of the conflict, it makes me more determined to go away and to tell their story and amplify those voices, to remind the world that there is this huge injustice, that there cannot be peace in the Middle East unless five million refugees are brought out of this state of dispossession and injustice.

UN News Centre: Last year you made headlines for different reasons than the usual – how did that come about?

Chris Gunness: The day I burst into tears on television began very early when an UNRWA school in Gaza was hit and people were killed when they slept on the floor of a UN classroom, and we were all called to the office, it was a very harrowing day. I was interviewed by Al Jazeera in Arabic; now, on Al Jazeera English, which is what I’m normally on, they sanitize it. Al Jazeera in Arabic showed that day appalling pictures and it was live, with a monitor just underneath the camera, so I saw all these images and I started to think “I can’t get through this – I’ve just seen too much suffering”. But I did just about manage to get through the interview and said goodbye at the end, but I began to feel myself losing control but it was live so I couldn’t just end it.

A sample of the public criticism to which Chris Gunness is regularly exposed to as part of his work with UNRWA:

Then when the interview was over I broke down crying. But I break down a lot. Often I would do an interview, put the phone down and weep quietly to myself because what we’re dealing with is so profoundly tragic and unjust. And these are people I know and work with, and have met them and they’re under attack in spaces I’m very familiar with.

So I put my head in my hands and wept uncontrollably and the Al Jazeera cameraman carried on filming, didn’t ask my permission, I had no idea, I thought it was a private moment of grief, and the footage was sent back to Doha and broadcast every hour at the top of the hour for the next day or so and went viral.

Afterwards, I had thousands of emails from people saying it was so human and so authentic a moment. And coming from a UN official it showed, I think, to the world, that the indignation and outrage was real. This was not some rhetorical “the UN is deeply concerned” or whatever, this was the UN clearly and profoundly grief-struck. I had emails from the people in the Secretary-General’s office saying “we’re all proud of you, we’re all pleased that we’re being portrayed as a human organization.” Nobody has said to me that you betrayed a lack of neutrality.” Quite the reverse – many have said “we’re proud that we have a spokesperson who can show that level of humanity.”

UN News Centre: There is a view that spokespeople should work under a strict principle of neutrality – do you think that is possible when you see up close so much suffering?

Chris Gunness: I think it’s very easy to confuse being neutral with being unengaged. I think it’s perfectly possible – in fact, I think it’s essential – that the UN should be engaged. I think you can have emotions as long as your brain, ultimately, is what rules your heart. And you’re able to use language which is neutral and are able to do things that are neutral, and you are able to project a sense of humanity while being neutral.

Certainly, I had an email from a very senior UNRWA leader saying that there’s nothing worse than a slick humanitarian, so people supported me and I had peacekeeping colleagues, colleagues in UNICEF, colleagues in [UN] information centres.
around the world just saying “what can we do to help you?” It was a very touching reaction, frankly.

**UN News Centre:** It is considered par for the course that spokespeople are attacked for their work. You have attracted your fair share of it, from government officials to members of the public on social media. How does that affect you?

**Chris Gunness:** I would like to say that it hasn’t affected me, that it’s all water off a duck’s back. But that’s not true. It’s affected me profoundly. What it doesn’t affect, I hope, is my judgement.

I think I have carried on, regardless of the attacks on me, I have carried on, I hope, very steadfast in the UN mission, and projecting the [UN] values and being able to project what UNWRA’s work is all about. But I go home and scream and shout at my partner; I go home and feel profoundly affected by it. But who wouldn’t be in that kind of situation?

I don’t think anyone really expects humanitarian workers not to be affected. I think quite the reverse, I think people would think you’re kind of weird if you went through these experiences and behaved as if you were going to an office every day and being an accountant.

I think we’re allowed to have emotions, it’s just that, ultimately, neutrality is what matters and I think you can have an engaging emotional life when you’re dealing with these unjust situations while still remaining entirely neutral.

**UN News Centre:** How do you unwind after a day at work?

**Chris Gunness:** I run and play the violin obsessively – it doesn’t look like I run very obsessively! I’m a musician, I was a musical scholar, at Oxford as it happens, and for me music is enormously important and I love medieval music and I’ve sung it. I was a performer, I used to sing in a professional choir and I continue to find music as a very restorative, palliative part of my life. So I listen to a lot of music, I play the violin, I run and I have the most wonderful partner you can imagine.

**UN News Centre:** Where do you see yourself after your stint with UNRWA?

**Chris Gunness:** Unfortunately, I’m defying the UN rule that you should move every four years. But, frankly, I can’t think of another job I want to do more. I have extraordinary colleagues, people I work closely with are inspirational humanitarians, we all have a real sense of engagement, and frankly, after the advocacy I’ve done, I’m not sure that many people want to employ me! Moreover, when you work with refugees who have lost everything it’s very hard to say goodbye and move on.

**UN News Centre:** Lastly, what end result do you see for the Israel-Palestine conflict?

**Chris Gunness:** I think that ultimately there will be a political resolution. People can’t be denied their rights for that long. History doesn’t have an example of where for decade after decade after decade people live in this state; scattered, exiled and dispossessed. I passionately believe – I may be dead – but I passionately and overwhelmingly believe, that there will be justice one day for the Palestinians.
UN marks World Breastfeeding Week with call for stronger workplace policies for nursing mothers

3 August - United Nations officials are marking the annual World Breastfeeding Week by highlighting the vital importance of a practice that gives children the healthiest start in life and the need to strengthen policies to promote nursing with stronger workplace policies.

The theme for this year’s observance, held from 1 to 7 August, is “Women and work – Let’s make it work,” which emphasizes the need for better support systems and policies to enable working mothers to breastfeed.

“We know that breastfeeding helps children to survive and thrive – enabling infants to withstand infections, providing critical nutrients for the early development of their brains and bodies, and strengthening the bond between mothers and their babies. And the benefits of breastfeeding last a lifetime,” said the heads of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Anthony Lake, and the World Health Organization (WHO), Margaret Chan, in a joint statement.

The statement points out that a recent Lancet study found that infants who were breastfed for at least one year went on to stay in school longer, score higher on intelligence tests and earn more as adults than those who were breastfed for only a month. Despite this growing evidence, only 38 per cent of infants around the world today are breastfed exclusively for even the recommended first six months of life.

While breastfeeding rates have increased in all regions of the world, global progress has stalled. The World Health Assembly has set a global target of increasing exclusive breastfeeding rates for children less than six months of age to at least 50 per cent by 2025.

“To achieve this ambitious and very important goal, we need to tackle all the barriers to breastfeeding,” said Mr. Lake and Dr. Chan. “Governments should lead the charge by making breastfeeding a policy priority in national development plans, increasing resources for programming that supports breastfeeding, and working with communities and families to promote the full benefits of breastfeeding.”

Also, more must be done to overcome an obstacle that prevents potentially millions of women from breastfeeding: Workplace policies that do not support the right of working mothers to breastfeed their babies on the job.

Today, of the approximately 830 million women workers in the world, the majority do not benefit from workplace policies that support nursing mothers, and this figure does not include women working in informal, seasonal or part-time employment – often the poorest women in poorer countries – who may face even greater barriers to continued breastfeeding. This is not only a loss to working mothers and their babies. It is also a loss to employers.

Working mothers with adequate maternity benefits, including a breastfeeding-supportive workplace, report increased job satisfaction and greater loyalty to their employers. Breastfed children fall sick less often, so their mothers are also less frequently absent from work. These effects in turn contribute to higher productivity – ultimately benefiting businesses and the larger economies to which they contribute.

Recognizing these connections, the UN International Labour Organization (ILO) has adopted three Conventions to establish protective measures for pregnant women and new mothers – including the right to continue breastfeeding – and to promote feasible options for women who are outside formal work settings. Globally, 67 countries have ratified at least one of the three maternity protection conventions.
The UN officials stressed that more governments should join the growing movement and take action to implement these important protections.

“We know that breastfeeding improves the lives of millions of children and ultimately benefits families, communities, and societies. Our challenge now is to make breastfeeding work in the workplace, too. Together, we can help working women to breastfeed and reap the benefits for themselves, for their children, and for the health and well-being of future generations.”

WHO recommends exclusive breastfeeding to begin within one hour after birth until six months of age. Nutritious complementary foods should then be added while continuing to breastfeed for up to two years or beyond.

**Iraq: UN officials underscore need to bring perpetrators of Sinjar tragedy to justice**

3 August - United Nations officials have reiterated the need to bring perpetrators of last year’s tragedy, in which militants from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) attacked as many as 200,000 civilians – most of them from vulnerable communities – causing them to flee to Sinjar, to justice as well as to increase protection for women and girls from conflict-related sexual violence.

It was a year ago that the attacks took place on members of the Yezidi community, as well as members of the Shi’a Turkmen, Shi’a Shabak and Christian communities, causing them to flee to Sinjar.

“In the days that followed, amidst horrific killings, ISIL hunted down and caught hundreds of women and girls from ethnic and religion minorities, instituting a pattern of sexual violence, slavery, abduction and human trafficking that continues to this day,” the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, said in a statement on the first anniversary of the tragedy.

She noted that first-hand accounts from internally displaced persons and refugees, some of whom she met during a visit to the Middle East in April, confirm systematic sexual violence, particularly against Yezidi women and children aged between 8 and 35 years.

Young women are being “sold” in open markets, gifted to foreign fighters, trafficked for sex in the region to raise funds and increase recruitment among ISIL’s ranks, she stated, adding that women and girls are also used for forced procreation, to populate the desired new “Caliphate” with children who can be raised in ISIL’s own “warped image.”

“These appalling crimes of sexual violence in conflict, which may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and/or acts of genocide, will not be forgotten. The international community stands united in the goal of pursuing the perpetrators and holding them to account.”

She reiterated her calls on the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL to include protection and empowerment of women and girls in their strategies to counter terrorism.

Also speaking out was the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, who strongly condemned ISIL’s continuous and deliberate terrorist strategy to target and exterminate entire communities on the basis of their ethnic background, religious beliefs or faith.

“This is especially harrowing for women, girls and children who are treated with untold brutality. We demand and support the liberation of Yezidi and other women and girls held by ISIL in captivity, often sold and used as sex slaves,” Mr. Kubiš said in a news release.

He stated that the instigators and perpetrators of the crimes committed against civilian populations and on ethnic or religious grounds, some of which may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, will sooner or later be brought to justice.
Mr. Kubiš, who is also head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), also acknowledged the efforts and support of the Government of Iraq and of the Kurdistan Regional Government, assisted by the international community, to the affected minorities.

At the same time, he underscored that “a more forceful and coherent action on the protection of minorities must take place, including active steps to ensure zero tolerance to impunity for those committing crimes against any and all humanities.”

Central African Republic: Security Council condemns attacks that killed peacekeeper

3 August - The members of the Security Council condemned today in the strongest terms the attacks against a convoy of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), which were perpetrated on Sunday in Bangui and resulted in the death of one peacekeeper.

“The members of the Security Council expressed their deepest condolences and sympathy to the family of the peacekeeper killed and to the Government of Cameroon, and to MINUSCA. The members of the Security Council wished a speedy recovery to those injured,” they said in a statement issued to the press.

MINUSCA peacekeepers were attacked by an armed group during a search operation intended to arrest a suspected criminal in application of a judicial warrant from the Public Prosecutor of Bangui. Eight peacekeepers were injured. Three suspects were arrested during the operation.

The members of the Security Council underlined that attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute a war crime and reminded all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law.

“They called on the Central African authorities to swiftly investigate, with the assistance of MINUSCA, this attack and bring the perpetrators to justice,” added the statement.

UN-backed international forum delivers roadmap for Somalia’s future

3 August - The United Nations and its partners have welcomed the significant commitments made at a recent high-level forum in Somalia that will be critical to the future of the Horn of Africa nation, including the holding of inclusive elections.

“We commend the commitments made at the High-Level Partnership Forum to deliver a transparent and inclusive electoral process in 2016, to strengthen security and to accelerate the delivery of concrete results to the people of Somalia,” they said in a joint press statement issued today.

The statement by the UN, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the European Union (EU), the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom, follows the two-day forum held in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, last week.

Co-hosted by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Somalia, Nicholas Kay, the forum reviewed the country’s progress in political, security and economic sectors.

The press statement noted that the commitment to immediately start a national consultation to agree on an electoral process for a timely transfer of public office in 2016 is a positive step.
“We also agree that the 2016 electoral process, based on inclusive consultations in the coming months, must represent an improvement on the 2012 process and be a steppingstone toward universal ‘one person, one vote’ elections,” it added.

Somalia’s international partners will follow progress closely and will make decisive efforts to help the people of the country meet these deadlines.

“Most immediately, we welcome the commitment to finalise by 15 August a detailed action plan for the national consultations on the 2016 electoral process,” said the statement, adding that such a plan should reflect the views of all stakeholders, in particular the Federal Parliament and the authorities in all the regional administrations.

“We urge all parties to engage seriously and urgently in finalizing this work and then to play a full role in the national consultative process.”

“Somalia’s international partners stated their resolve to the timely implementation of the commitments taken and agreements reached and to continue to support the goal of a united, federal and democratic Somalia, at peace with itself and the rest of the world,” said the statement.

Last week, the Security Council authorized the Member States of the African Union to maintain the deployment of AMISOM until 30 May 2016, and extended the mandate of the UN Special Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) until 30 March 2016, underlining the importance of both missions strengthening their relationship to ensure support for the country’s political process.