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‘Shock must be matched by action,’ UNICEF chief declares as heart-breaking images reveal plight of children in Europe’s refugee and migrant crisis

3 September - As the “heart-breaking” image of a drowned refugee boy who washed up on a beach in Turkey ricocheted around the world on social media, along with equally painful images of children lying suffocated in the backs of trucks crossing borders and being passed over barbed wire fences by desperate parents, Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund today made a powerful plea for action to protect migrant and refugee children.

“It is not enough for the world to be shocked by these images. Shock must be matched by action,” declared the UNICEF chief.

On 26 August 2015, a distressed child rests over the shoulder of the man carrying him, in the town of Gevgelija, on the border with Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Photo: UNICEF/Tomislav Georgiev

UNICEF estimates that at least a quarter of the hundreds of thousands of people who have sought refuge in Europe are children, many of whom have fled the conflict in Syria.

Some 2,500 people have died or gone missing this year while attempting the crossing to Europe.

For information media - not an official record
“Our hearts go out today to the families who have lost children – off the coasts, on the shores, and along the roadsides of Europe,” said Lake. “As the debates on policies proceed, we must never lose sight of the deeply human nature of this crisis. Nor of its scale,” he added, noting that at least a quarter of those seeking refuge in Europe are children – in the first six months of this year, more than 106,000 children claimed asylum in Europe.

“And we should never forget what lies behind so many of the stories of families seeking sanctuary in Europe: terrible conflicts such as that in Syria, which already has forced some 2 million children to flee their country. Only an end to these conflicts can bring an end to the misery of so many.”

Spotlighting sustainable development, ‘Global Goals’ campaign launched at UN

3 September - As United Nations Member States prepare to adopt a new set of Sustainable Development Goals, a ground-breaking collaboration of campaigners, public figures, companies and civil society groups is uniting to tell seven billion people in seven days that “it’s time to change the world.”

During a press conference at UN Headquarters today, the Global Goals campaign, founded by filmmaker Richard Curtis, was announced as aiming to make the 17 UN Goals famous and to push for their full implementation worldwide.

Described as an “unprecedented effort,” the campaign is supported by a variety of other social movements including action/2015 – a coalition of over 2000 organizations – and Global Citizen, a community of ordinary people that help fight extreme poverty.

The campaign has been launched in the wake of a momentous event earlier this week: the UN General Assembly approved a resolution sending the draft ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ to Member States for adoption at a Summit in New York later this month.

The Agenda, its 17 proposed Goals and 169 targets aim to be a charter for people and the planet in the twenty-first century. They will stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance towards building a more equitable and sustainable world for all.

Speaking to journalists with only 22 days to go before the UN Sustainable Development Summit, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Cristina Gallach, said 2015 is a “unique year.”

“Being famous is absolutely necessary to ensure that [the goals] are implemented,” Ms. Gallach said. “We couldn’t have a better partner for this process than Richard Curtis’s team. Everybody will be able to resort to his creative products that are going to serve as a major asset to ensure that the Goals are known.”

Mr. Curtis, the filmmaker behind major international hits such as Four Weddings and a Funeral, Notting Hill, and Mr. Bean, presented “Project Everyone,” the mission of which is to get a “short, dynamic and snappy” explanation of the Global Goals to all of the planet’s citizens.

“I was looking forward to 2015 and thought I should do something in order to try and make these new goals much more famous and much more well-known than the Millennium Development Goals were,” Mr. Curtis explained.

“And it came as no surprise to me that as I started to say these things, I found out that so many people that I’d worked with before, so many of the NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and campaigners also felt the same thing.”

The British scriptwriter began working with the United Nations on a campaign that would be “fun, bright, entertaining, and interesting,” to attract attention, especially of young people. One outcome is the first ever global cinema ad, an animation produced by Aardman featuring world leaders depicted as animals. It is expected to appear in movie theatres in over 30 countries.
Meanwhile, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, Amina Mohammed, noted that she has just returned from her home country Nigeria, where she travelled by road through Boko Haram-controlled territory.

“It’s important that this set of Goals is known by everyone, in the hamlets and the villages of Nigeria,” Ms. Mohammed said. “This is coming to make a difference in their lives.”

She also stopped in Austria where she spoke with young people faced by the challenge of migration.

“This agenda […] is not about just stemming the tide of what is happening with forced migration,” she explained. “But it is about dealing with root causes so that people don’t have to flee their own countries, their own villages, their own homes because they can’t have a life of dignity there.”

Finally, 22 year-old Shaila Huq, spokesperson for the action/2015 campaign, said the Global Goals campaign speaks to her entire generation, which could be the first one to live in a world without extreme poverty.

Conflict keeps millions of children out of school in Middle East and North Africa, warns new UNICEF report

3 September - More than 13 million – that is the number of children who are prevented from attending school by surging conflict and political upheaval across the Middle East and North Africa, according to a new report released by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today.

“A region which – until just a few short years ago – had the goal of universal education well within reach, today faces a disastrous situation,” says the report, Education Under Fire, which focuses on the impact of violence on schoolchildren and education systems in nine countries that have been directly or indirectly impacted by violence.

The UNICEF report says attacks on schools and education infrastructure – sometimes deliberate – are one key reason why many children do not attend classes.

“In Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya alone, nearly 9,000 schools are out of use because they have been damaged, destroyed, are being used to shelter displaced civilians or have been taken over by parties to the conflict,” it says.

Other factors, according to the agency, include the fear that drives thousands of teachers to abandon their posts, or keeps parents from sending their children to school because of what might happen to them along the way – or at school itself.

“The destructive impact of conflict is being felt by children right across the region,” said Peter Salama, Regional Director for UNICEF in the Middle East and North Africa. “It’s not just the physical damage being done to schools, but the despair felt by a generation of schoolchildren who see their hopes and futures shattered.”

In Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, more than 700,000 Syrian refugee children are unable to attend school because the overburdened national education infrastructure cannot cope with the extra student load.

“Like children anywhere, they want an opportunity to learn, and acquire the skills they need to fulfil their potential,” the report said. “This constitutes a clear challenge to the international community, host governments, policy makers, and all those who want to see the Middle East and North Africa emerge from its current turmoil.”

The report highlights a range of initiatives – including the use of self-learning and expanded learning spaces – that help children learn even in the most desperate of circumstances. But it says that the funding such work receives is not commensurate with the burgeoning needs, despite the fact that children and parents caught up in conflict overwhelmingly identify education as their number one priority.
In particular, the No Lost Generation Initiative, launched by UNICEF and other partners in 2013 to galvanize more international backing for the education and protection needs of children affected by the Syria crisis deserves more support, the report says.

The report calls on the international community, host governments, policy makers, the private sector and other partners to: reduce the number of children out of school through the expansion of informal education services especially for vulnerable children; provide more support to national education systems in conflict-hit countries and host communities to expand learning spaces, recruit and train teachers and provide learning materials; and in countries affected by the Syria crisis, advocate for the recognition and certification of non-formal Education services.

**In Beijing, UN chief urges China to help build momentum ahead of Paris climate change conference**

**3 September** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today thanked China for its efforts to address climate change, both through its actions and policies, and called for Beijing’s continued support for building momentum ahead of the Paris Climate Change Conference.

Mr. Ban made the appeal in separate meetings with the President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Keqiang, Vice Premier Liu Yandong, and Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing, where he attended commemorative events in the Chinese capital marking the 70th anniversary of the Second World War.

At a meeting with President Xi Jinping earlier today, the Secretary-General commended China’s strong commitment to multilateralism and its contributions, including to UN peacekeeping operations, the fight against the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, and its mediation efforts, notably in South Sudan, Iran and the Korean Peninsula.

In all his meetings, he thanked China for its efforts to address climate change, both through its actions and policies, and its instrumental role in helping to reach the sustainable development agreement.

“The Secretary-General called for continued support from China for building momentum ahead of the Paris Climate Change Conference and the implementation of the new sustainable development agenda,” his spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told reporters.

Mr. Ban told the President that he looks forward to his visit to the UN Headquarters later this month to attend the Sustainable Development Summit, the General Debate and other important high-level events, including the Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, and the High-level Roundtable on South-South Cooperation, both co-hosted by the Government of China.

In his discussions with the Chinese leaders on their country’s commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment, Mr. Ban expressed appreciation for the Beijing’s collaboration with UN Women on the forthcoming Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, to take place at the UN headquarters in New York on 27 September 2015.

The high-level meeting marks the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.
Civilians in Syria suffering ‘a living tragedy’ with no end in sight, UN human rights expert warns

3 September - With nearly half Syria’s population now displaced or made refugees by a “protracted and chaotic” conflict, the head of a United Nations-mandated human rights inquiry today warned that while the world watches, civilians, Syrians of all backgrounds, are being subjected to war crimes, as well as other gross violations of their human rights.

“Civilians are suffering the unimaginable, as the world stands witness. Without stronger efforts to bring parties to the peace table, ready to compromise, current trends suggest that the Syrian conflict – and the killing and destruction it wreaks – will carry on for the foreseeable future,” said Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.

In a press conference on the release of the Commission’s tenth report on the situation in Syria, he said: “We must do more for the victims of this conflict who have been forced to flee their homes and to seek protection and refuge under the direst of circumstances.”

Mr. Pinheiro also stressed that it is imperative for the world community to act with humanity and compassion by developing legal channels of migration that increases the protection space for asylum seekers and refugees.

According to the Commission, the armed conflict in Syria, now in its fifth year, has become a protracted and chaotic non-international armed conflict. A proliferating number of warring parties continues to display a complete disregard for their international legal obligations by targeting civilians, residential areas, and locations protected under international law.

Combat tactics employed by all sides to the armed conflict, such as the use of siege warfare, indiscriminate shelling and use of air power have resulted in mass civilian casualties, destruction of Syria’s cultural heritage and displacement of Syrian civilians on a massive scale, says the Commission.

In its report, the Commission, which was established in 2011 by the UN Human Rights Council, is concerned that warring sides continue to target civilians, including fighting-age men, women, children, detainees, the sick and wounded, medical and humanitarian workers, journalists, human rights defenders and internally displaced person. It calls for urgent action to ensure the protection and safety of all civilians.

The report notes that atrocities are being carried out by both Government and terrorist groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Jabhat Al-Nusra. Government forces “have committed gross violations of human rights and the war crimes of murder, torture, rape, sexual violence and targeting civilians” and its indiscriminate aerial bombardments have led to mass civilian casualties. ISIS, meanwhile, continues to murder, torture, rape, and forcibly displace civilians.

The Commission goes on to report that men are the primary civilian victims of enforced disappearance, torture and unlawful killing. Women and girls are also targeted, with Government forces arresting female lawyers, journalists and peace activists.

ISIL has placed women and girls entirely under the control of male relatives, and women and girls over the age of 10 cannot leave their homes without a close male relative. ISIL has also subjected Yazidi women and girls to abuse, imprisoning many into sexual slavery. The terrorist organization has also executed children in Hasakah, Raqqa, and Dayr Az-Zawr, often forcing children into the role of executioner.

“As the world stands witness, the Syrian people are suffering to an unimaginable extent,” said Mr. Pinheiro. “It is the responsibility of the warring parties in the Syrian conflict and influential states to seek peace, and the particular responsibility of the international community to open a path to justice for Syrian victims.”

The report is scheduled to be presented later this month during an interactive dialogue at the 30th session of the Human
Amid ongoing crisis largely ignored by world, Myanmar floods deal major blow to agriculture – UN agency

3 September - Heavy storms, floods and landslides across nearly all of Myanmar have destroyed huge swaths of rice paddies, as well as fish and shrimp ponds, and are expected to severely limit the availability of food if aid is not provided to farmers swiftly, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned today.

“Having seen the scale of it first hand, it’s stunning that this emergency situation is widely being underestimated by global media and international donors,” Bui Thi Lan, FAO Representative in Myanmar, said in a press release drawing attention to the situation.

FAO said that “urgent support is needed to help farmers recover from a month of extreme monsoon weather, worsened by the arrival of Cyclone Komen at the end of July that has affected more than 1.6 million people and inundated more than 1.4 million acres of farmland.”

The deluge also destroyed some 972,000 acres – most of all paddy rice – 36,000 acres of fish and shrimp ponds, and an estimated 20,000 head of cattle, according to the agriculture agency.

“Now that the water is receding, we need to act swiftly to help rural communities get back on their feet, providing them the seeds, equipment and other support they need to grow food, raise animals, restore their livelihoods and build their resilience to future shocks,” said the FAO representative.

Some 385,000 households have been displaced by the floods and landslides that destroyed thousands of homes, and irrigation canals in 12 of the country’s 14 provinces, the agency reported.

FAO also said that out of the six provinces hit hardest by the monsoonal floods, four have been the stage of recurrent intercommunal tensions since June 2012 that have displaced more than 660,000 people, making those regions especially vulnerable to the impacts of the floods.

Humanitarian agencies are supporting the Government of Myanmar with critical supplies of food, shelter, sanitation and medical aid, but many UN agencies are reporting funding shortfalls that prevent them from responding to the best of their abilities. Severe damage to roads, bridges and railways is making these ongoing relief and recovery efforts extra challenging.

FAO is preparing the distribution of rice, beans and winter crops that can be planted as soon as the dry season starts in October. Other likely interventions include vaccination drives for cattle and distribution of animal feed to help farmers keep their herds alive and healthy.
Yemen: UN calls for unimpeded access to people in need as fighting intensifies in southwestern region

3 September - Air strikes, armed confrontation and looting across Taiz governorate in Yemen have exacerbated an already desperate situation, dramatically escalating humanitarian suffering, the United Nations relief wing warned today, urging unimpeded access to those in need.

Densely populated, Taiz was already one of the most vulnerable of the 22 governorates in the country, with 1.8 million people targeted by the UN for humanitarian assistance.

In its latest crisis update, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that from 14 to 27 August, at least 95 civilians, including 52 children and 20 women, were killed, and 129 civilians, including 14 women and 36 children, were injured by indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling.

The city of Taiz is being described by the UN “as a battleground,” with people caught between the frontlines and unable to find safety and security. Private homes are reportedly being destroyed as punishment for perceived support for opposing parties.

In addition, OCHA is warning that the health system across the governorate has nearly collapsed due to the damage to health infrastructure caused by the conflict and the lack of fuel, medicines and hospital supplies. None of the six public hospitals in the governorate are operational, with the exception of the emergency unit and the kidney ward at the Al-Thawrah and Al-Jumhouri hospitals.

Meanwhile, in violation of international humanitarian law, militants reportedly seized the Yemen International Hospital in Taiz and its ambulances on 24 August. According to OCHA, they forced all 80 patients, 20 of them in the intensive care unit, out of the hospital.

Further exacerbating the public health outlook in Taiz, an extreme spike in cases of dengue fever has been recorded in the last two weeks with 432 cases as of 25 August. The city’s inhabitants are also at greater risk of contracting communicable diseases due to solid waste piling up on the sides of roads.

The UN is reiterating its call today for predictable, safe, and unimpeded access to communities in need in the whole governorate, to deliver the much needed life-saving assistance to those who it says continue to suffer in Taiz.
UN human rights chief deplores new allegation of sexual abuse in CAR

3 September - United Nations staff in the Central African Republic (CAR) learned on 30 August that a girl was allegedly sexually abused around a year ago by a member of the French military force there, known as Sangaris, according to the world body’s human rights chief.

The girl, who is believed to have been in her mid to late teens at the time of the alleged abuse, gave birth to a child in April, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, said in a news release today.

These allegations follow cases reported in August by the human rights group Amnesty International, involving troops from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA).

“This is the latest in a series of appalling allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by foreign troops in CAR,” the High Commissioner said. “Although this particular case did not involve UN peacekeepers, there have been a number of other cases in CAR – and elsewhere – which have. We simply have to find ways to prevent such odious acts being committed by any soldiers anywhere who are supposed to be protecting vulnerable populations.”

The High Commissioner, who is currently visiting CAR, said that the French authorities have been informed of this latest allegation, and that the United Nations stands ready to assist in an investigation. He added that governments of countries which contribute troops to UN peacekeeping operations have an obligation to investigate all such cases in a timely manner.

“Any UN or other foreign military personnel found guilty must be given sentences that fit the crime,” Mr. Zeid said.

The UN human rights chief also underlined that his office is working closely with MINUSCA, and with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which, through its partners, will provide psycho-social support and legal assistance for the girl and her family.

The victim has reportedly lodged a paternity case with the local authorities.

Guatemala: following President’s resignation, Ban calls for peaceful elections

3 September - Taking note of the resignation of President Otto Pérez Molina of Guatemala, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today said he trusted that the authorities would abide by the Constitution and ensure an orderly democratic transition.

“The Secretary-General is aware of the deep desire shown by the country’s citizens to put an end to corruption and impunity, as well as ongoing calls for legal and political reforms,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.

Welcoming constructive efforts by the people of Guatemala to participate in and contribute to their country’s political system, the UN chief appealed to the authorities and all sectors of society to work together in order to strengthen institutions and the rule of law in the country.

Calling today a historic day, Alberto Brunori, Representative for the High Commissioner of Human Rights in Guatemala, said in an interview with UN Radio that the UN is maintaining the observation of human rights, considering that on Sunday…
there will be the first round of elections.

“We will monitor human rights, particularly possible attacks on human rights defenders,” said Mr. Brunori, adding that they will try to have a deployment to prevent forms of violence and conflicts.

“We would like to see a transition period with the reforms that the people, the Guatemalans, are asking for,” he underscored.

**Liberia again declared free of Ebola transmission as number of cases remains stable in wider West Africa**

3 September - The World Health Organization (WHO) today declared Liberia free of Ebola virus transmission after the disease had resurfaced in June, and enters a 90-day period of heightened surveillance, as the number of cases in the rest of West Africa remained stable at three for the fifth consecutive week.

“Liberia’s ability to effectively respond to the outbreak of Ebola virus disease is due to intensified vigilance and rapid response by the government and multiple partners,” WHO said. “Transmission had been declared over previously on 9 May 2015, but the disease re-emerged on 29 June and 6 additional cases were identified.”

In the latest update on Ebola, which has taken the lives of more than 11,000 people mainly in West Africa, WHO said 3 confirmed cases of Ebola were reported in the week to 30 August: two in Guinea and one in Sierra Leone.

The case in Sierra Leone is the first in the country for over 2 weeks, and the detection of the new has prompted the use of an experimental vaccine to fight the disease.

**India teams up with UN-backed alliance to accelerate financial inclusion for all**

3 September - The Government of India has taken a step closer to becoming a cashless economy by joining the Better Than Cash Alliance, a United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) initiative that helps enable countries transition to electronic payments.

“India’s leadership and progress are inspirational for countries around the world,” said Dr. Ruth Goodwin-Groen, Managing Director of the Better Than Cash Alliance. “By making the digitization of payments to achieve financial inclusion a top priority, the Indian Government is showing its commitment to improving the lives of its people and driving inclusive growth.”

The Alliance is a partnership of governments, companies, and international organizations that accelerates the switch from cash to digital payments to reduce poverty and drive inclusive growth. It aims to help people who lack access to formal financial services such as bank accounts, and who often subsist almost entirely in an informal, cash-only economy.

Other recently joined members of the Alliance include Rwanda and Ghana.

The Indian Government’s new relationship with the Alliance complements its own financial inclusion programme, Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), which, according to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, has been instrumental in bringing many families into the formal financial system.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will join other world leaders at the UN summit later this month to launch the Sustainable Development Goals. Financing for development, which includes digital financial services, is a key means of
implementation for the Goals. Advocates hope India’s membership of the Better Than Cash Alliance will inspire other
governments to harness the power of digital payments as a strategy for achieving the Goals.

**UNESCO chief condemns killing of Philippine journalist, calls for inquiry**

*3 September* - The head of the United Nations agency charged with promoting press freedom condemned today the killing of Philippine journalist Cosme Diez Maestrado, who was shot by unknown assailants on 27 August in Ozamiz City in the Philippines.

“Journalists are paying an unacceptable price for the fundamental right of freedom of expression,” Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), said in a statement, condemning the murder of Cosme Diez Maestrado.

Mr. Maestrado was an anchor at DXOC radio in Ozamiz City. He had survived a previous assassination attempt in November 2013, according to the International Federation of Journalists.

“I urge the authorities to spare no effort in apprehending those responsible for this crime,” said Ms. Bokova.

Condemnation of Violence against Journalists, as Resolution 29 adopted by UNESCO Member States in 1997, is issued by the Director-General of UNESCO and posted on a page dedicating to journalists who were killed in the exercise of their profession. It remembers their contribution to freedom of expression, democracy and peace.