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Concerned over potential violence in Burundi, UN chief urges resumption of dialogue

4 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon remains concerned about the potential for escalating violence in Burundi and has reiterated his call for calm and restraint amid the African country’s simmering political tensions.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, the United Nations chief urged the Burundian authorities “to abide by their international commitments with respect to human rights, including the right to peaceful assembly.”

Burundi has been embroiled in a political crisis since mid-April when popular protests erupted after the country’s ruling National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party nominated President Pierre Nkurunziza as its presidential candidate for a third term.

The situation escalated shortly thereafter, on 13 May, following an attempted coup d’état as President Nkurunziza left for the Summit of the East African Community, which was intended to try to resolve the crisis.

In today’s statement, Mr. Ban called on the country’s authorities to ensure that security forces avoid the use of excessive force in handling demonstrations and stressed that those responsible for ordering or committing human rights violations would be held accountable.

In addition, he noted that the Security Council intended to consider “the various tools at its disposal to safeguard peace in Burundi and ensure accountability.”
Further, the Secretary-General encouraged Burundian stakeholders to “resume in earnest” the consultative political dialogue facilitated by his Special Envoy, Said Djinnit, and hoped that the parties to the dialogue will implement, without delay, the confidence-building measures already agreed.

Mr. Ban also urged the swift implementation of measures “to help create the conditions for the holding of peaceful, inclusive and credible elections in Burundi,” such as the disarmament of all armed youth groups associated with political parties.

The Security Council was briefed today in a closed-door session by Mr. Djinnit as well as the UN Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, who visited the country on 30 and 31 May.

In a statement released to the press, the 15-member body reiterated their concern with the violent acts perpetrated in Burundi and the impact of the crisis on the region. “They called on all Burundian stakeholders to demonstrate their sense of responsibility, to exercise restraint, not to resort to violence or retaliatory attacks, to settle disputes peacefully and to prioritize Burundi’s peace and stability above all else and in the best interests of the nation.”

The Council also called on all Burundian parties to reach agreement on a new electoral calendar; reinstatement of private media; protection of civil and human rights; release of detainees; holding accountable those who have used violence; respect of the rule of law; and the urgent disarmament of all armed youth groups allied to political parties.

In addition, it reiterated their intent “to respond to violent acts which threaten peace and security in Burundi.”

The crisis in Burundi has not only led to growing tensions within the country but has also spawned a troubling humanitarian crisis across the region as thousands of Burundian refugees stream across the country’s borders and into neighbouring States such as Rwanda, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Since early April, nearly 100,000 Burundians have fled their country, according to UN estimates.

Major funding gap has left Iraq on brink of ‘catastrophe,’ UN warns as new humanitarian appeal launched

4 June - Critical aid operations supporting millions of people affected by the conflict in Iraq are at risk of shutting down unless funds are made available immediately, senior United Nations warned today as they joined an international appeal for nearly $500 million to cover the immediate needs of 5.6 million Iraqis for the next six months.

“Humanitarian partners have been doing everything they can to help. But more than 50 per cent of the operation will be shut down or cut back if money is not received immediately,” Lise Grande, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the war-torn country said at an appeal launch at the European Parliament in Brussels.

The implications of this, Ms. Grande said, would be “catastrophic” in what is already one of the most complex and volatile crisis anywhere in the world. Humanitarian needs in Iraq are huge and growing. More than 8 million people require immediate life-saving support, a number that could reach 10 million by the end of 2015.

According to the United Nations, some 2.9 million people have been forced from their homes since January 2014. And with the conflict escalating, the UN and its non-governmental (NGO) partners have launched the Humanitarian Response Plan [HRP] asking donors for $498 million to cover the cost of providing shelter, food, water and other life-saving services over the coming six months.

The appeal aims to target 5.6 million people displaced or affected by the violence between Government forces and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

 Violence has already forced nearly three million people from their homes, leaving them scattered in more than 3,000 locations across the country. Human rights and rule of law are under constant assault. Mass executions, systematic rape and
horrendous acts of violence are also rampant. The funding shortfall has already caused 77 frontline health clinics to close while food rations for over a million people have also been reduced.

Assistance Secretary-General, Kyung-Wha Kang delivering remarks at today’s meeting on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien, said that every one of the three million displaced people is an individual story – a child, a woman or a man.

“All segments of the Iraqi society – Yezidi, Christian, Shabak, Turkmen, Shia, Sunni and Kurd – have been affected by the violence,” he added.

“Families have had to move several times to stay one step ahead of the horrific violence sweeping across whole regions of the country. Others do not know where they can find safety, caught in a sectarian divide that is not their making,” he said.

Fighting has disrupted food supply, damaged or destroyed hospitals, and hundreds of schools are now being used as emergency shelters. Women and girls are being abducted and subjected to systematic sexual violence and enslavement. Some children have suffered the loss of their parents; others have been forced to fight or to flee for their lives.

*Iraq on the brink: Voices of anguish from a nation in turmoil. Credit: UN Iraq*

“All while we search for solutions to end the violence, we must do everything in our power to help them. The people of Iraq need our help, now,” he said.

Also speaking today was Volker Türk, Assistance High Commissioner for Protection at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said that Iraqis are “trapped by the ever-shifting maze of frontlines,” and in some places held virtually hostage by armed groups.

“The diminishing resources for survival in such situations are often accompanied by an increasing loss of hope,” Mr. Turk said. “The model of protection is truly anchored in community and provides a strong demonstration of people-to-people solidarity. It reminds us that there are opportunities in a crisis, including in displacement, where individuals may find ways to support one another around their shared experience.”

Investing in the humanitarian response, which is centred on protection and builds upon the capacities and resilience of affected communities, lays the groundwork for a peaceful future in Iraq, he added.

**UN official stresses need for renewed momentum towards achieving climate accord**

**4 June** - “The clock is ticking faster and faster” before an agreement must be reached in Paris in December, but “so much has happened over the past few weeks,” a senior United Nations climate change official said today.

Briefing the press at UN Headquarters, Assistant Secretary-General for Climate Change Janos Pasztor highlighted recent initiatives meant to bolster the efforts towards a successful outcome at the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-21), which will be held in Paris at the end of the year.

In Paris, countries are expected to agree on a universal, legally binding agreement to enable the international community to combat climate change effectively and to boost the transition towards resilient, low-carbon societies and economies.

“The findings of the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change action show that action now can limit climate change, but if we wait, it will be increasingly difficult and more expensive,” Mr. Pasztor told reporters.
In 2010, governments agreed that emissions need to be reduced so that global temperature increases are limited to below 2 degrees Celsius. “Let’s remind ourselves that the business as usual scenario is showing us a 4-degrees path or more, and that we need to bring it down to at least the 2-degrees path,” noted Mr. Pasztor.

Highlighting recent events, he touched on the Petersburg Dialogue held in May in Berlin, which he said was marked by a “major” announcement by Chancellor Angela Merkel that Germany is prepared to double its climate finance assistance by 2020, showing “clear leadership.”

He also welcomed another commitment made by French President François Hollande, whose country is about to introduce a new legislation that requires institutional investors to demonstrate what is the “carbon footprint of their assets,” reinforcing “transparency” in that regard.

Also in May, the Business and Climate Summit held in Paris provides a forum for business and government leaders to adopt forward-looking strategies and call for ambitious policies that will allow for scaling up solutions. The Summit built on the momentum created in New York last September, when Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for the private sector to drive more action and mobilize political will for a meaningful agreement in 2015.

“The Secretary-General is committed to promoting global action, which will not only address climate change, but also promote economic growth and greater opportunities in terms of health, education and employment,” underlined the Assistant Secretary-General.

September’s UN Climate Summit was an “amazing” meeting, he added, noting a “tectonic shift” in the way the private sector is now dealing with the issue of climate change and coming up with concrete proposals. “Who could have thought, five or six years ago, that we would have a major international gathering of CEOs and senior representatives unanimously calling to decarbonize the economy?”

Mr. Pasztor also pointed to the latest round of negotiations that began this week in Bonn aimed at achieving progress on an agreement for Paris, and welcomed the “positive mood” among delegations, even though he acknowledged that the talks “could go a little faster,” as there is a “long draft document” to go through and things cannot be left to the end of the process.

**UN mission in Central African Republic opens investigation into sexual abuse claims**

4 June - The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (CAR) has launched an investigation into allegations of sexual abuse against an underage person involving one of its personnel, it was announced today.

UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told reporters in New York that Babacar Gaye, the head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA), had immediately authorised an investigation after the Mission received information of the alleged offense, reportedly committed by a ‘blue helmet’ in the eastern part of the country.

Mr. Gaye has reiterated the UN’s zero tolerance policy when it comes to sexual abuse, according to the spokesperson, who also noted that measures have been implemented to protect the alleged victim and provide her with the appropriate care.

“The UN has also asked the troop-contributing government of the soldier implicated by these allegations to launch an investigation as soon as possible,” Mr. Dujarric added.

The allegations come on the heels of an ongoing inquiry into another instance of reported sexual abuse in CAR involving foreign troops and predating MINUSCA’s arrival in the country.
UN envoy ‘mustering’ required support for consultations to resolve Yemen conflict

The United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, is working intensively to bring the parties to the conflict together as soon as possible in Geneva, a spokesperson for the world body said today.

“Mr. Ahmed is currently mustering the required Yemeni, regional and international support before announcing the start of the consultations. We hope to be able to make an announcement very soon,” Stéphane Dujarric said at a press briefing at UN Headquarters.

The Special Envoy is in Abu Dhabi today, following a visit to Riyadh, and is likely to undertake additional visits and extensive consultations in the subregion.

As efforts to convene the Yemen consultations continue, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon once again reiterates his call for a further humanitarian pause in order to allow assistance to reach the Yemeni people, Mr. Dujarric emphasized.

Humanitarian needs are becoming increasingly intense, and urgent measures by the international community, as well as regional States, are required to alleviate the worst consequences of the fighting.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that the Operations Room of the Ministry of Health in Sana’a, which manages all emergency operations for Yemen, was damaged yesterday.

The damage incurred is expected to further cripple already strained emergency health relief operations. The UN’s humanitarian partners have supported the Ministry of Health in ensuring effective emergency health response, including equipping and building the capacity of the very Operations Room that was damaged yesterday.

Yesterday’s incident follows attacks on dozens of health facilities by fighting, shelling, and airstrikes in Yemen since the escalation of the conflict in March. In addition, ten health care workers have been killed or injured while carrying out their duties since that time. The World Health Organization (WHO) continues to appeal for the protection of health facilities, staff and patients.

The new Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien, warned yesterday in a briefing to the Security Council that a full resumption of commercial imports of vital commodities, including food, fuel and medicines, is required to avoid a looming humanitarian catastrophe.

UN agency reports world food prices declining to six-year low

The prices of major food commodities continued their downward trajectory through May as cereal prices dropped amid an increasingly favourable forecast for this year’s harvests, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) confirmed today.

According to the UN agency’s monthly Food Price Index, the May 2015 forecast for the global production of wheat, coarse grains and rice has been “upgraded” as maize harvests in China and Mexico as well as more abundant wheat harvests in Africa and North America are currently anticipated.

The resulting drop in prices for May marks a steady 3.8 per cent monthly decline in the cereal price index, a 2.9 per cent drop in the dairy price index and a one per cent drop in the meat price index.
In addition, the Organization also predicts that global rice output will grow by 1.3 percent from last year mainly due to increases across Asia. That forecast, however, remains subject to “much uncertainty,” as the outcome of the season will very much depend on the unfolding of the season in the next few months, the FAO said.

Overall, the agency added, the Food Price Index is registering its lowest value since September 2009.

Meanwhile, bucking the trend, the sugar price index rose 2 per cent, due to temporary delays in Brazil’s crushing season despite abundant supplies and the vegetable oil price index rose 2.6 per cent, partly driven by concerns that the strengthening of meteorological conditions provoked by El Niño may affect production in Southeast Asia.

The Food Price Index is a trade-weighted index that tracks prices on international markets of five major food commodity groups: cereals, meat, dairy products, vegetable oils and sugar.

**DR Congo: UN voices support for Government offensive against militia**

*4 June* - The United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has welcomed the latest military operation by the country’s armed forces against members of an independent militia group following the collapse of political negotiations.

The military operation – launched on 3 June by the national army (FARDC) against militants aligned with the Front de Résistance Patriotique de l’Ituri (FRPI) – is the latest attempt by the UN-backed Government forces to protect civilians and neutralize the threat posed to peace in the country.

“This attack demonstrates the strong commitment of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to fight all armed groups,” the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of MONUSCO, Martin Kobler, said in a press release.

MONUSCO’s support comes at the FARDC’s request following a breakdown of negotiations with FRPI combatants who, as of early 2015, counted a contingent of some 300 child soldiers among their ranks. In addition, the militia also stands accused of gross human rights violations and illegal traffic of natural resources.

Speaking from the frontlines of the hostilities from where he is supervising the UN’s on-the-ground engagement, MONUSCO Deputy Head David Gressly reaffirmed the Organization’s commitment to finding a peaceful solution to the country’s political impasse.

“The National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programme, which we fully support, will make every effort to welcome combatants who lay down their arms,” Mr. Gressly stated. “I call on FRPI combatants to enrol in this Government programme which is supported by MONUSCO.”

Mr. Gressly is currently travelling between the cities of Bunia and Aveba, in the country’s northeast, where MONUSCO has deployed several units and used attack helicopters to support the Congolese army’s efforts.
Senior UN official calls for global movement to end hunger once and for all

4 June - The head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today called for a global movement to eradicate hunger as countries look ahead to the new set of development goals that will be adopted in September.

“The entire world is called to join in a global movement to end hunger and malnutrition once and for all,” FAO Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva said today during his opening address at the International Agricultural Forum at EXPO Milan.

He called on delegates to “embark on this journey,” noting that the UN system is offering full support to more than 100 countries that have already committed to end hunger. “Citizens, producers and the private sector all have a role,” he underlined.

Mr. Graziano da Silva noted that the Forum, attended by more than 50 agriculture ministers and delegates from more than 100 countries and international organizations, comes at a crucial moment in history as it coincides with the end of a 15-year global effort to reduce hunger as well as a new one that will promise to eradicate it altogether.

Progress achieved through the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which targeted the halving of the share of populations suffering hunger, demonstrates that the next and bolder goal is possible, according to FAO.

A priority of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) currently being negotiated by the international community is a time-bound framework to “end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture,” Mr. Graziano da Silva explained.

“Hunger’s root cause is not the scarcity of food but poverty, itself linked to a spectrum of inequalities and revolving around questions of access – access to water, land and other productive resources, access to resources, income and markets, as well as access to adequate social protection,” he added.

Ministers gathered in Milan to discuss how to improve food security, nutrition and food systems are expected to sign on Friday the “Carta di Milano,” an initiative of the Italian Government that seeks to nudge countries, organizations, companies and citizens to pledge to find solutions to food and nutrition challenges.

The Carta will be central to the Expo’s legacy, Mr. Graziano da Silva underscored, noting that citizens “must do their part” by reducing food waste and consuming environmentally friendly products, and that responsible investors must also act in a way that enhances food security and nutrition.

Producers, he added, can choose from an array of options, including agroecology and climate-smart agriculture, to ensure sustainable production.

Expo Milano 2015 runs through 31 October. Over a six-month period, Milan will become a global showcase where more than 140 participating countries will exhibit the best of their technology that offers a concrete answer to a vital need: being able to guarantee healthy, safe food for everyone, while respecting the planet.
Benefits of mammograms outweigh adverse effects for older women – UN agency

4 June - A group of 29 independent experts from 16 countries, convened by the specialized cancer agency of the United Nations, has concluded that there is sufficient evidence that mammography screening is effective in reducing breast cancer-related deaths for women aged 50–69 years.

The benefit of reduced mortality extends to women screened at age 70–74 years, according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), which is part of the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

A summary of the assessment carried out by the group, which considered emerging technologies, clinical breast examination, and breast self-examination, was published yesterday in the New England Journal of Medicine. It provides a critical update to the landmark 2002 IARC Handbook on Breast Cancer Screening in light of recent improvements in treatment outcomes for late-stage breast cancer and new data on screening practices and their outcomes.

“Careful consideration of both the benefits and harms of mammography screening shows a net benefit from inviting women 50–69 years old,” Dr. Lauby-Secretan, an IARC scientist and the Responsible Officer for the Handbooks Series, said in a news release.

“The significant reduction in breast cancer mortality observed in this age group outweighs the effects of overdiagnosis and other adverse effects,” she added.

An evaluation of data from studies conducted in high-income countries (in Australia, Europe, and North America) showed that women 50–69 years of age who attended mammography screening had a reduction in breast cancer mortality of around 40 per cent.

“Providing early access to effective diagnosis and treatment in developed and developing countries is critical to reduce breast cancer mortality globally,” said Dr. Christopher Wild, the Director of IARC. “The IARC Handbook on breast cancer screening provides the most up-to-date evaluation of the scientific evidence. This provides a foundation on the basis of which governments can implement the best intervention strategies in order to save more lives.”

However, evidence for the effectiveness of screening women in the younger age group of 40–49 years was considered limited. The most important harms of early detection of breast cancer by mammography screening are false-positive results, overdiagnosis, and radiation-induced breast cancer.

Among the group’s conclusions is that there is sufficient evidence that mammography screening detects breast cancers that would never have been diagnosed or caused harm if the women had not been screened. There is also sufficient evidence of an increased risk of radiation-induced breast cancer from mammography screening in women aged 50 years or older but that risk is substantially outweighed by the reduction in breast cancer mortality.

Evaluation of the current literature also showed that there is sufficient evidence that clinical breast examination is associated with the detection of smaller and earlier-stage tumours. However, no data were yet available for an evaluation of the effect of this screening technique on breast cancer mortality. For breast self-examination, most studies did not show a reduction in breast cancer mortality.

Numerous studies have investigated the beneficial effects of screening modalities other than mammography. However, none of the emerging technologies, either in addition to or as a replacement for mammography, had sufficient evidence of a reduction in breast cancer mortality.

Breast cancer is the most common cause of death from cancer in women worldwide, the second leading cause of death from
cancer in women in high-income countries, and the leading cause of death from cancer in low- and middle-income countries, where a high proportion of women present with advanced disease, which has a poor prognosis.

Established risk factors for breast cancer include age, a family or personal history of breast cancer or pre-cancerous lesions, genetic predisposition, reproductive factors, hormonal treatment, alcohol consumption, obesity, and exposure to ionizing radiation.

**Ban commends leaders’ commitment to settle Cyprus issue**

4 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today commended the commitment of the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mustafa Akinci, and the Greek Cypriot leader, Nicos Anastasiades, to reach a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus issue.

Mr. Ban, who met today with Mr. Akinci in New York, welcomed the “positive atmosphere” surrounding the ongoing talks, encouraging the leaders “to stay on this path,” according to a read-out provided by the Secretary-General’s spokesperson.

The negotiations resumed on 15 May under the facilitation of the UN Special Adviser, Espen Barth Eide, who recently said that he strongly felt 2015 would be a decisive year.

The Secretary-General assured Mr. Akinci of his personal commitment and that of his Special Adviser to continue facilitating the talks.

Mr. Ban also welcomed the leaders’ agreement to work on a number of confidence-building measures that would benefit both communities, according to the read-out. Such measures, he noted, could help to increase and sustain the positive environment on the island.

**In Zambia, UN forum urges faster development action for landlocked developing nations**

4 June - A United Nations-backed conference aimed at accelerating an ambitious development plan for the world’s 32 landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) concluded today in Zambia with a global ‘Call to Action’ intended to streamline their path towards sustainable, inclusive and economic progress.

The three-day high-level meeting, held in Livingstone, builds on the successes of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPOA), in which Member States outlined a 10-year blueprint for the development of LLDCs based on overcoming challenges related to "landlockedness, remoteness and geographical disadvantages," according to a press release issued by the UN Office for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS).

“The Livingstone meeting was critical in highlighting the importance of the effective implementation of the VPOA in partnership with transit countries and development partners,” the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Gyan Chandra Acharya, stated.

“Enhanced and strengthened multi-stakeholder partnership will be indispensable for turning landlocked countries into landlinked countries,” Mr. Acharya added. “This is what came out strongly in the high-level meeting.”

The VPOA, adopted by the Second UN Conference on LLDCs last November, contains six clearly defined priorities and encapsulates a unified stance by the international community on a broad array of crucial issues – from concrete steps toward the structural transformation of LLDC economies and infrastructure development, to improving international trade and bolstering regional integration and cooperation.
In addition, the document is action-oriented, as it clearly spells out tangible actions to be taken by LLDCs, transit countries and development partners in each of the six priority areas identified together with clear national, regional and global level implementation, monitoring and review.

To that point, the Livingstone Call to Action urges Member States to pursue “several concrete measures to catalyse the implementation of the six priorities,” including the adoption of steps to enhance the structural economic transformation in the LLDCs and improving their share of international trade through policy measures.

The latter recommendation is particularly resonant, said UN-OHRLLS, given that the LLDCs’ share of international trade in 2014 stood at a meagre 1.2 per cent.

Celebrating the Call to Action as a “clear” call for implementation of development goals for the LLDCs, the Chair of the Group of LLDCs, Yamfwa Mukanga, urged the international community to ramp up efforts to ensure that the momentum of the VPoA is maintained in the coming months.

“As the post-2015 UN development agenda is about to be adopted,” said Mr. Mukanga, “the international community at large should ensure that the challenges of LLDCs are taken on board and that solutions are found.”