UN chief says ‘challenging period’ in Yemen’s political transition must be overcome

5 February - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged parties to the Peace and National Partnership Agreement in Yemen overcome the current impasse so the peaceful democratic transition that was launched in 2011 can be fulfilled.

Mr. Ban’s letter, which was read today in the capital, Sana’a, by his Special Adviser on Yemen, Jamal Benomar, reminds the party heads of the “tremendous burden and responsibility” they have to steer Yemen through what he described as a “challenging period.”

Stating that the Yemeni people’s aspirations for a democratic State, based on respect for human rights and the rule of law, were captured in the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, Mr. Ban urged leaders to act in the national interest and agree a peaceful way forward that meets their expectations and ensures continuation of the peaceful political transition in the country.

Despite formation of a new Government in November 2014 aimed at ending a period of political turbulence and bringing about a full transition towards democracy, Yemen continues to be plagued by violence and mass political demonstrations.

Just two weeks ago, Mr. Ban voiced serious concern about developments following the abduction by the opposition group Ansarallah of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi’s chief of staff and the resignation of the President and Prime Minister amid a takeover of the capital by Houthi militants. This followed a steady deterioration the previous week as Government forces clashed with militant groups throughout the capital.
‘Last mile in fight against Ebola will be the hardest,’ says senior UN relief official

5 February - The international community’s mobilization in the global Ebola response has been “very impressive and effective” but efforts to reach zero cases must continue unabated, a top United Nations humanitarian official has confirmed.

“There is most definitely a fantastic combined community, national and international effort that has turned this crisis around,” John Ging, Director of Operations for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told reporters at a press briefing in New York earlier today.

“But there is no room for complacency,” Mr. Ging added. “The last mile is the hardest mile. We must stay the course.”

Confirming the need for ongoing vigilance, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported today a surge in new Ebola cases this past week, ending a series of declines the agency noted when it reported that the number of new cases in the three hardest-hit countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone recently fell below 100 for the first time in seven months.

“While remarkable progress has been made, we must not forget that it only takes one new case to start a new outbreak,” stressed Mr. Ging.

He also noted that as optimism among Ebola responders grows, a simultaneous shift towards recovery is also taking place with efforts focusing on sending children back to school and rebuilding the local economies that were gutted by the epidemic.

Mr. Ging, who recently visited countries in the Ebola-affected region to assess existing emergency coordination structure, explained to journalists that emergency health workers had undertaken “heroic” efforts in educating communities and treating Ebola patients as “human as possible.”

Above all, he said, they had been instrumental in broadcasting the mantra that “early detection, early treatment is the key to survival” despite the strident communication difficulties present in many of the West African countries.

“If you get into detection centres early, survival rates can increase and they do,” he noted, in response to questions.

In Guinea alone, communication remained a “big challenge” with only two per cent of the population owning a television. Moreover, community outreach had encountered much resistance with suspicion and fear breeding misperceptions and misinformation and fomenting, in some cases, acts of violence against the health workers.

Nevertheless, Mr. Ging continued, communities remained mobilized with children returning to school and reclaiming their futures – a key to helping these countries “get back on their feet as soon as possible.”

“This crisis has exposed weaknesses in the health services delivery for the populations in these countries,” he said, warning that Ebola would only be defeated if responders also confronted the issues that prompted the crisis.

As a result, he urged donors to remain focused on combatting the disease and maintain “the resolve to stay the course, to eliminate the virus.”

It is not a question of if West Africa will get to zero cases, but a question of when, Mr. Ging concluded.
“The number of cases has been reduced dramatically,” he said. “It has brought a sense of hope for people in the region.”

**Sealing borders ‘will continue to fail on massive scale,’ UN rights expert tells European countries**

5 February - Migrants will continue to arrive and stay in Europe “no matter what,” so the overall goal should be to ensure they use official channels to enter and stay, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants said today.

In 2014 more than 150,000 migrants and asylum seekers arrived in Europe by sea, compared with 80,000 in 2013, according to a press release issued today by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The Rapporteur, François Crépeau, at end of an official visit to Brussels to follow up on a study on the management of European Union (EU) external borders that was launched in 2012, warned: “Any attempt at sealing borders – as the nationalist populist discourse stridently calls for – will continue to fail on a massive scale.”

“Sealing international borders is impossible,” he said. “Migrants will continue arriving despite all efforts to stop them, at a terrible cost in lives and suffering if nothing else is put in place.”

Migrants and asylum seekers move due to the ‘push factors’ in their countries of origin, which may include war, conflict, natural disasters, persecution or extreme poverty, as well as in response to ‘pull factors’ such as the unrecognized needs in the labour markets of EU Member States, said the release.

“These push and pull factors are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future,” the expert said.

“I urge the EU and EU Member States to progressively establish a human-rights-based, coherent and comprehensive migration policy which addresses these issues and makes mobility its central asset,” Mr. Crépeau said. “A common narrative celebrating mobility and diversity, recognizing real labour market needs, as well as the needs of migrants, based on human rights guarantees and access to justice, must be developed.”

He also said “the European Union must bank on mobility in order to regain control over its borders,” and explained that meant “that the overall goal is to have migrants using official channels to enter and stay in Europe.”

“For that, EU Member States must accept that migrants will continue to come, no matter what, and offer them incentives to use regular channels, because these will respond to their needs, as well as to the economic and social needs of Europe,” the Rapporteur said.

Emphasizing that “the status quo isn’t sustainable,” Mr. Crépeau said that “by continuing to invest financial and human resources mostly on securing its borders, Europe will certainly continue to lose control of its borders.”

During his visit to Brussels from 2 to 5 February 2015, the independent expert met with a range of EU officials responsible for border management, international organizations and civil society organizations, to discuss the complex management of the EU border, focusing particularly on the issue of migrants and asylum seekers arriving by boat. It was the third and final component of his follow-up study on the management of the EU external borders launched in 2012.

Mr. Crépeau was appointed Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants in June 2011 by the UN Human Rights Council, for an initial period of three years. As Special Rapporteur, he is independent from any Government or organization and serves in his individual capacity.
In Washington, UN rights chief says atrocities can be prevented through better global leadership

5 February - World leaders too often choose to violate international law and set aside moral principles. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said today, as he warned against “sinking into a state of paralysis” and called for a deeper form of education that equips people with moral courage to act toward one another with responsibility and care.

During his first visit to the United States in his capacity as the top UN human rights official, Mr. Zeid delivered a speech at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. – one week after the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz – emphasizing that education devoid of a strong universal human rights component can be next to worthless, especially in a crisis.

“What good was it to humanity that…eight out of 15 people who planned the Holocaust at Wannsee in 1942 held PhDs?” he asked. “In the years after the Holocaust, specific treaties were negotiated to cement into law obligations to protect human rights. Countries the world over accepted them – and now alas, all too frequently, they ignore them in practice.”

While it has been 70 years since the liberation of Auschwitz extermination camp, some of the processes used by the Nazis to carry out humanity’s largest organized destruction are being implemented again today by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), explained Mr. Zeid.

“This logic is abundant around the world today: I torture because a war justifies it. I spy on my citizens because terrorism, repulsive as it is, requires it. I don’t want new immigrants, or I discriminate against minorities, because our communal identity or my way of life is being threatened as never before. I kill others, because others will kill me – and so it goes, on and on.”

Since the world cannot afford “sinking into a state of paralyzing shock…the task is to strengthen our ethics, clarity, openness of thought, and moral courage,” calling for new battle lines to combat extremism – based on the struggle for minds.

“Children need to learn what bigotry and chauvinism are…they need to learn that blind obedience can be exploited by authority figures for wicked ends. They should learn that they are not an exception because of where they were born, how they look, what passport they carry, or the social class, caste or creed of their parents; they should learn that no one is intrinsically superior to her or his fellow human beings,” said Mr. Zeid.

The world needs “profound and inspiring” leaders who fully observe human rights and humanitarian law and all the treaties drafted to end discrimination, poverty, war, “with no excuses.” Only then, can we help ourselves out of the “supply of crises that threatens to engulf us,” the UN rights chief emphasized.

It is obvious, Mr. Zeid continued, that forceful reprisals against atrocities – including “the savage burning of my compatriot the pilot Mu’ath al Kassasbeh” by ISIL – have had limited impact. Leaders must adopt a “battle-line based on ideas,” to speak out against Takfiri ideology (when one believer apostasies another believer and condemns them as impure). The movement to end that dangerous ideology must be waged by Muslim leaders and Muslim countries, he said.

“Just bombing them or choking off their financing has clearly not worked…for these groups have only proliferated and grown in strength,” he said. “The space for dissent in many countries is collapsing under the weight of either poorly-thought out, or indeed, exploitative, counter-terrorism strategies.”
Few crises erupt without warning, he continued. Extremist ideas and violence manifest from years of tyranny, inequalities, fear and bad governance. They build up over years – even decades – of human rights grievances and the denial of basic economic and social rights.

He insisted that atrocities can be prevented and extremism curbed through better, human rights-based global leadership and a fundamental rethink of education. “Surely we now know, from bitter experience, that human rights are the only meaningful rampart against barbarity.”

**Security Council, in second statement this week, condemns Boko Haram attacks along Chad-Cameroon border**

*5 February* - The United Nations Security Council today condemned “in the strongest terms” the escalation of attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram terrorists along the border between Cameroon and Nigeria, including back-to-back attacks this week that killed Chadian and Cameroonian troops, as well as “a sizeable number of civilians.”

The 15-member Security Council also urged countries in the region to enhance military operations and coordination to more effectively and immediately combat Boko Haram, which, after more than a year of large-scale deadly attacks in in northern Nigeria, has in recent weeks attacked villages in Cameroon, displacing thousands to neighbouring countries and sparking fears that its insurgency was expanding beyond Nigeria.

In their statement, the second on Boko Haram attacks in as many days, Council members commended the Chadian army’s swift assistance in the fight against Boko Haram in Nigeria, during which territory was recaptured from Boko Haram, and more than 200 members of the terrorist group were neutralized and equipment was recovered including a dozen vehicles mounted with heavy weapons.

Council members referred to an attack on Tuesday 3 February alongside the Cameroon-Nigeria border against the Chadian army contingent deployed to fight Boko Haram in Cameroon and Nigeria. That attack killed 13 Chadian soldiers and injured twenty one others, according to the press statement.

The Council also condemned an attack a day later on 4 February “against the civilian population and Cameroonian troops, which killed at least three Cameroonian soldiers and a sizeable number of civilians in Fotokol.”

The Chadian military counterattack against Boko Haram into Nigerian territory was conducted with the consent and the collaboration of the Federal Republic of Nigeria whose territorial integrity remained intact, according to the Council statement.

The Security Council members also extended their condolences to the families of the victims and their sympathy to all those injured in these heinous attacks, as well as to the people and the Governments of the Republic of Chad and Cameroon.

Recalling its Presidential Statement of 19 January, the Council reiterated its deep concern that the activities of Boko Haram are undermining the peace and stability of the West and Central African region.

Urging the region to enhance regional military operations and coordination to more effectively and immediately combat Boko Haram, the members of the Security Council welcomed the convening of a meeting of experts in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 5 to 7 February 2015, following the recent African Union (AU) Summit held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to finalize the concept of operations for the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and other related documents.
In South Sudan, senior UN official says ‘no doubt’ rights violations are ongoing

5 February - Warring parties in the South Sudan conflict say they are close to signing a peace deal, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ivan Šimonović, told reporters in Juba today as he confirmed that while fighting has decreased, rights violations continue in the world’s youngest country.

“I have met victims of recent violations – victims who are survivors of killings – so violations are ongoing...It is appalling to hear that in certain areas of the country, I think it was the month of August, a ‘month of rape’ was proclaimed. This is absolutely intolerable,” he said.

Mr. Šimonović, who is the country until 6 February assessing the human rights situation, met with South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and his former Vice-President, Riek Machar. Earlier this week, the two leaders concluded a round of talks with a deal on a cease-fire, but without a broader agreement on running the country, which has been engulfed by war for more than a year.

“They have been assuring me that they are close, but it is not enough to be close. Peace has to be signed,” Mr. Šimonović said, reiterating the Secretary-General’s call for the two leaders to listen to their people. “There is a common message coming from everyone, be they women or men, young or old, Nuer or Dinka. People want peace.”

Visiting some of the hard hit areas, he said it was striking that both Bentiu and Malakal have become “destroyed cities.” During the day, there are some signs of life, but at night they become “ghost towns” because people return to the UN’s protection sites. Mr. Šimonović warned that with over 50,000 people at sites operated by the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Bentiu, and over 20,000 in Malakal, the situation is not sustainable for long. “It is essential to push for peace,” he stressed.

Pushing for peace requires ending the impunity cycle. Because of a lack of accountability in previous times, violations have been occurring. This “vicious cycle” has to be broken, he declared, emphasizing the need for broader participation in the peace process.

“We need representatives of all ethnic groups, we need civil society, we need women, we need elders, we need religious leaders. Only if there is broad inclusion in the political process will there be a chance for sustainable peace.”

The security situation in South Sudan has steadily deteriorated since political in-fighting between President Kiir and his former deputy, Mr. Machar, started in mid-December 2013. The hostilities subsequently turned into a full-fledged conflict that has sent nearly 100,000 civilians fleeing to United Nations bases around the country.

According to the UN, some 2.5 million people could be in need of food assistance in through March of 2015, especially if hostilities in the country continue through the dry season.

The new deadline for the two leaders to reach a peace pact has been set by the peace broker, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), for the 5 March.
Guinea-Bissau situation ‘fragile’ after return to constitutional order, UN envoy tells Security Council

5 February - Despite the efforts of Guinea-Bissau authorities, the situation remains fragile and the country still needs the support of the international community, the top United Nations envoy in the country told the Security Council today.

“The return to constitutional order, as positive as it was, has not yet made it possible to address the root causes of instability in Guinea-Bissau,” said Miguel Trovoada, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the country as he briefed the Council on the latest developments.

This means, he continued, that the political and social environment is characterized by a climate where hope for the future is tempered by uncertainty.

Turning to a number of positive steps made by the Government, he said that with regard to the reform of the defense and security forces, the minister responsible for that sector had introduced new amendments to the law on the establishment of the special pension fund. She had also presented to the Prime Minister a list of eligible staff for demobilization or retirement.

“In the month of January, the Minister of Justice led the review and validation of the proposed program of reform of the justice sector,” he continued. “Again, this is an important step towards the establishment of justice that is accessible, transparent and credible in Guinea-Bissau.”

According to the Special Representative, the country would nevertheless continue to need support, including strengthening of democratic institutions, restructuring of the defense and security sector, strengthening of the judicial system, improving the functioning of public administration and increasing capacity to combat impunity and transnational crime.

He said the Secretary General had recommended strengthening the good offices of his Special Representative. He added, however, that “the assistance provided by the international community in Guinea-Bissau cannot last forever.”

“The challenges are enormous, numerous and complex, but they are not insurmountable. The consolidation of peace and stability in Guinea-Bissau, a prerequisite of development, requires joint efforts, patience and perseverance,” concluded Mr. Trovoada, who is also head of the UN Integrated Peace-Building Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS).

UN chief appoints new Special Coordinator for Middle East peace

5 February - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today appointed Nickolay Mladenov of Bulgaria as his new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, the UN Spokesperson’s office announced today.

Mr. Mladenov, who is currently head of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), will replace Robert Serry, of the Netherlands, to whom Mr. Ban is “grateful for his dedicated service and excellent leadership of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO),” said a note to correspondents.

Mr. Mladenov has also been a Member of the European Parliament for Bulgaria before and served as his country’s Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence.

In his new role, he will, among other things, oversee the ongoing UN-backed reconstruction efforts in Gaza where thousands of people are seeking access to building materials for urgent repairs to their homes following last summer’s conflict in the war-ravaged enclave.
According to a recent UN assessment, as it stands now, over 100,000 homes were damaged or destroyed, affecting more than 600,000 people. Many people still lack access to the municipal water network. Blackouts of up to 18 hours per day are common.

In addition, the violence killed more than 2,100 Palestinians and more than 70 Israelis.

**Development must be built on inclusive policy aligned with people’s needs, aspirations – Ban**

5 February - In a speech to the United Nations Commission for Social Development on the 20th anniversary of the Copenhagen Declaration – the outcome of a summit which emphasized, for the first time, the need to put people at the centre of development – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today that the world’s current generation is the first able to wipe out extreme poverty and the last that could address the worst impacts of climate change.

“There is one word above all that must guide us on this roadmap to ending poverty, transforming lives and protecting the planet,” he told the Commission, and added: “That word is: dignity.”

Mr. Ban said that policymakers in the past had focused too much on economic growth, without taking into account social concerns or environmental factors.

“The World Summit on Social Development helped reorient thinking,” he said. “It emphasized that economic growth must be judged in terms of its impact on human well-being – rather than an end in itself. It stressed not just the quantity, but the quality of growth.”

He described how the 1995 World Summit – which has become informally known as the ‘Social Summit’ – has emphasised the integrated nature of social, economic and environmental pursuits and had emphasised the need to put people “at the centre” of development.

The Secretary-General went to emphasize the importance of social development to making the planet just, safe and healthy for everyone and he said that all development should be built on a foundation of policies centred on peoples’ needs and aspirations.

Noting the year’s importance to global development, with the target date of the MDGs approaching and negotiations ongoing for a new sustainable development agenda under way, Mr. Ban underlined the importance of the Commission’s continuing work following-up and implementing the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

“On this 20th anniversary of the World Social Summit, let us reaffirm our commitment to promoting social development and social justice, and building a better – more sustainable – world for all,” he said.
New UN sustainability agenda needs low-carbon growth to meet goals, Ban tells Delhi summit

5 February - Speaking via video message to the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit organized by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) of India, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called for countries to take a low-carbon approach to development in the coming years.

“Over the next fifteen years, the world will make massive investments in new infrastructure for cities, energy and agriculture,” he said. “If this spending is directed towards low-carbon goods, technologies and services, we will be on our way towards a more sustainable, equitable future. But if we ignore the low-carbon pathway, we may fail to achieve the sustainable development goals,” he added referring to the targets currently being crafted by UN Member States to succeed the landmark, largely poverty-focused Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after 2015.

He looked ahead to the upcoming summits on sustainable development and on climate change and he stressed that the two were complementary and interdependent, emphasising the contribution renewable energy could make to cleaner air and better health, and the potential of climate-smart agriculture to boost water and food security.

“Climate change threatens to undermine hard-earned development gains,” he said. “But combatting it is an opportunity for low-carbon growth that will benefit people and the planet.”

Mr. Ban pointed to India’s ‘development without destruction’ vision and described how it is apparent in the country’s rapid scale-up of solar power, the Ganga Rejuvenation project and the creation of smart cities.

“These solutions can reduce poverty, catalyse clean, sustainable growth, and increase resilience to climate change,” he said.

He underlined the need for Governments to build policy frameworks in order to build the momentum necessary to pursue the correct, sustainable course and said the private sector, civil society and the scientific community and think-tanks such as TERI also had important roles to play.

“We need all hands on deck to meet the climate challenge,” he said. “Now is the moment. It is time for action – time for a global agreement.”

Food prices continue to fall, spurred by cheap oil and abundant supply – UN

5 February - Global food prices have continued to plummet, aided by a weak euro and the low cost of crude oil, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported today in its monthly Food Price Index.

The trade-weighted index, which tracks prices of cereals, meat, dairy products, vegetable oils, and sugar on international markets, averaged 182.7 points over the month of January, down 1.9 per cent from its December level. Overall, the index had seen declines since April 2014. However, January’s dip was helped by “robust inventories” as well as continued strength in the United States dollar and weak global oil prices.

In addition, the UN agriculture agency noted that strong supply conditions for wheat and soy oil, as well as abundant global pigmeat available for export, had also contributed to the products’ price decline.

For its part, the FAO Dairy Price Index remained stable throughout the first month of the year, averaging 173.8 points, as rising butter prices offset a decline in prices for other dairy products such as cheese and skimmed milk powders. Meanwhile,
sugar, averaging at 217.7 points, remained “virtually unchanged” from December.

Against that backdrop, global cereal stocks in 2015 are forecast at around 623 million tonnes, up eight per cent from last year with inventories of wheat and maize expected to grow. Rice inventories, on the other hand, are “poised to drop” by some 4 million tonnes in 2015 with notable reductions in India, Indonesia and Thailand.

Nonetheless, the FAO pointed out that global cereal stock-to-use ratio for 2014 and 2015 would likely rise to 25 per cent – its highest level in more than a decade and “well above” the historic low of 18.4 per cent recorded in the 2007 – 2008 biennium.

**Great Lakes region must unite to stamp out armed groups in DR Congo, urges UN envoy**

**5 February** - Countries must come together to “neutralize all negative forces” terrorizing the population in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region urged today following meetings with top Rwandan officials to discuss recent peace and security developments in the region.

The call for united action comes a day after a massacre of civilians took place in the area of Beni town in the DRC’s restive northeast. Civilians in the village of Mayangose-Kibidiwe were attacked with machetes. At a separate attack in Kasu, in Eastern Province, several villagers were beheaded by people from outside, the UN Mission in that country (MONUSCO) confirmed.

"Countries in the region should remain united in efforts to neutralize all negative forces in eastern DRC and support military action against the FDLR," Special Envoy Said Djinnit said in a statement released from Rwanda’s capital, Kigali, today.

The FDLR, or the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, is an armed group comprised of perpetrators of the 1994 Rwanda genocide who have a long history of heinous crimes in the DRC. They were given six months to voluntarily surrender, as set out by the joint International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) meeting of Ministers of Defence on 2 July 2014.

That deadline expired on 2 January, at which time the UN Security Council urged that “all necessary measures” be taken to disarm the rebels.

During his visit to Rwanda, Special Envoy Djinnit met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Louise Mushikiwabo; Minister of Defense, James Kabarebe; as well as senior defence and security officials. He also met with the Chairman of the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC). During various meetings, Mr. Djinnit stressed the need to address the root causes of conflict including socio-economic and governance challenges.

He pledged UN’s support to help DRC Government take military action against the FDLR, which has caused ‘untold suffering to innocent people.’ Meanwhile, Rwanda’s Government must stay engaged on the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework, signed in Addis Ababa on 24 February 2013. The UN fully supports the repatriation process of the ex-M23 combatants involving DRC, Rwanda and Uganda, in line with the Nairobi Declarations, Mr. Djinnit said.

“I welcome the joint Communiqué signed on 3 February by representatives of the Governments of the DRC and Rwanda, in which they agreed on steps for the repatriation of the ex-M23 combatants and the handing-over of military equipment to the DRC as soon as possible,” the Special Envoy added.

He encouraged efforts towards convening the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL) Summit that is expected to bring together the Heads of State of Burundi, DRC and Rwanda. Rwanda must continue to play its role, together with other regional countries, in the preparation of the Great Lakes Private Investment Conference planned for this year.

In a separate statement yesterday, the head MONUSCO, Martin Kobler, stressed that nothing will deter the UN mission
from its purpose to neutralize all armed groups. Mr. Kobler, who is also the Secretary-General’s Special Representative in the country, pledged UN support to the Congolese authorities to ensure that ‘everything is done’ to prosecute the perpetrators of atrocious killings.

**UN chief ‘gravely concerned’ as civilian death toll from Ukraine conflict continues to rise**

5 February - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has voiced grave concern over the continuing hostilities in eastern Ukraine amid an escalating rebel offensive which has locked civilians in a zone of intense fighting.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson late yesterday evening, the Secretary-General said he was particularly distressed over the plight of civilians in the city of Debaltseve, situated along the conflict's frontline, where they remained trapped without basic services and under constant danger from indiscriminate shelling.

A recent uptick in fighting in eastern Ukraine between Government and anti-Government forces has seen casualty figures spike with 224 civilians killed and 545 wounded in the three weeks leading up to 1 February. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the overall death toll now exceeds 5,358 people, with another 12,235 wounded since mid-April last year.

“The rebel offensive continues and civilians are dying on a daily basis,” the statement declared. “The signatories of the Minsk accords and the entire international community need to assume their responsibilities to ensure that this conflict ends. The United Nations stands ready to continue to support the consolidation of a sustainable and lasting peace process.”

The Secretary-General further condemned “in the strongest terms” continuing reports of indiscriminate shelling and called on both sides “to immediately move their military positions away from densely populated civilian areas.”

The civilian death toll from the fighting has been particularly high in the residential areas of both Government-controlled territory, such as the towns of Avdiivka, Debaltseve, Popasna and Shchastia and the settlement of Stanitsia Luhanska, as well as the cities of Donetsk and Horlivka controlled by the armed groups. In the single most deadly incident involving civilians, at least 31 people were killed and 112 wounded in Mariupol, following two attacks by multiple launch rocket systems.

In the statement, the spokesperson added that Mr. Ban stands with others in the international community in support of the proposal by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) for “a temporary truce that would allow for the immediate evacuation of civilians from Debaltseve” and notes that this proposal can only gain ground through “good-faith negotiation.”

At the same time, the Secretary-General reiterates his call for “a sustainable cease-fire to take hold and for urgent diplomatic and political action.”

The Ukrainian crisis began to unfurl in late February 2014 when it evolved from an initial internal political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country. It later reached full-scale conflict in the east. Despite the Minsk cease-fire, the situation in Ukraine has since continuously deteriorated, with serious consequences for the country’s unity, territorial integrity and stability. Recent media reports have suggested a potential worsening of the situation amid claims of a massive recruitment campaign by anti-Government groups.