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‘Magnitude of dangers facing Libya should not be underestimated,’ UN envoy tells Security Council

5 November - The magnitude of the dangers facing Libya should not be underestimated, the top UN official in the country told the Security Council today, noting that despite the passing of the timeline by which the United Nations had hoped a final political settlement would be endorsed, there is yet to be a final agreement.

“Since the high-level meeting on Libya which took place on the margins of the General Assembly on 2 October, [the UN Support Mission in Libya, UNSMIL] convened what should have been a final round of talks in Skhirat, Morocco to facilitate Libyan deliberations on the composition of the Presidency Council that would lead the country’s future Government of National Accord,” Bernardino León, the Head of UNSMIL, told the Security Council.

Indeed, after four days of intensive consultations which concluded on 8 October, members of the Libyan political dialogue process had succeeded in forging consensus on a list of six nominees, including a Prime Minister designate, three deputy Prime Ministers, and two Senior Ministers.

According to Mr. León, the proposed composition of the Presidency Council was seen as a means of securing the necessary consensus and inclusivity that would allow for a Government of National Accord to assume office with the requisite support and backing of all relevant political and security stakeholders, as well as the Libyan public at large.

“While the proposal was hailed as a major breakthrough in the dialogue process, strong objections were voiced in some quarters, notably from within the House of Representatives, for what was perceived as inadequate representation for the east, particularly Benghazi,” he explained, in what is expected to be his last address to the Council as UNSMIL chief.
In the three weeks that followed the announcement of the proposed composition of the Presidency Council, the official indicated that the United Nations has consulted closely with parties from across the political spectrum in an effort to resolve outstanding concerns regarding representation.

In this regard, he said there appears to be growing support to the idea of expanding the Presidency Council “as a means of consolidating and safeguarding Libya's historical traditions of geographical and regional balance and representation.”

“Despite the passing of the 21 October constitutional timeline by which we had hoped that a final political settlement would be agreed and endorsed by the main political stakeholders, there is yet to be a formal and final pronunciation by either of the main political stakeholders on the Libyan Political Agreement and the proposed Presidency Council,” he noted.

Meanwhile, working closely with representatives of the international community, Mr. León said UNSMIL continued to impress upon both the Libyan House of Representatives and the Tripoli-based General National Congress the need to urgently convene sessions that would allow for a democratic vote on the Political Agreement and proposals for the Presidency Council.

“While I have always remained hopeful about the chances of Libya’s leaders reaching a peaceful agreement, I have had no illusions about the difficulties and challenges that would likely face the political dialogue process,” he told the Council.

He added that the growing influence of terrorist and other extremist groups is posing a direct threat to the very authority of the Libyan State, with “the cruelty and barbarity witnessed in areas under their control an omen of what may yet come unless there is united action to contain and eliminate this growing threat.”

“Equally important is the scale of human suffering,” Mr. León continued. “The political and military conflict has exacted a heavy toll on the Libyan people. Death and displacement have become an all too common a theme, particularly in Benghazi which has for the longest duration borne the brunt of the conflict in Libya. Massive displacement of population, the destruction of entire civilian neighbourhoods and vital infrastructure, and large-scale human rights abuses which continue to take place on a regular basis have scarred the city beyond the recognition.”

He added that the “cowardly targeting by terrorists of peaceful demonstrators” in the city on 23 October is an urgent reminder of the need to expedite efforts towards peace, and that restoring peace and stability to Benghazi will be the first step towards stabilising Libya.

During his address to the Council, Mr. León also reminded Libya’s leaders that they have a unique opportunity to reach a political settlement that could spare their country and people further bloodshed and destruction.

“The proposed Agreement was never intended to provide a panacea for all of Libya’s problems, but rather to lay out a set of structures and principles that would guide the next phase of Libya's political transition until such time that the constitution making process is completed,” he stated.

Ending his remarks, he said the next few days will be critical to Libya’s future. “While the United Nations will continue to encourage the two main political stakeholders to formally endorse the Political Agreement and the proposed composition of the Presidency Council, it will also continue working with the moderate voices from the different dialogue tracks as well as from across Libya’s political and civil society spectrum, as well as those among security actors, for the sake of forging a viable way forward.”

In conclusion, he said the onus is now on Libya’s leaders to forge a new political reality and bring a decisive and permanent end to their country’s political turmoil and armed conflict.

Earlier this week, it was announced that Martin Kobler, the current Head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), will succeed Mr. León as Head of UNSMIL.
‘I will never stop calling for an end to the death penalty,’ Ban vows at launch of new UN publication

5 November - Vowing to never stop calling for an end to the death penalty, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today said studies have proven that those who are poor, mentally disabled, and/or are minorities are at higher risk of receiving the death sentence, regardless of guilt or innocence.

“That is simply wrong,” Mr. Ban said in his remarks at the launch of a book, Moving Away from the Death Penalty: Arguments, Trends and Perspectives, by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at the UN Bookstore in New York.

The book documents injustices that are “sickening,” Mr. Ban noted, “but the arguments for change are compelling” and cited that “more and more countries and States are abolishing the death penalty” in all regions of the world.

“But there is also a backlash,” he warned, and expressed his deep concern that “some States are sentencing more people to death and others are resuming executions.”

Attending the launch was Kirk Bloodsworth of the United States, who is the first person exonerated from death row by post-conviction DNA evidence. He was introduced by UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Cristina Gallach. The Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, Sebastiano Cardi, also made remarks.

“[Mr. Bloodsworth] represents the reason we are here today. He is totally innocent of any crime. But like too many other people, he suffered the unforgivable injustice of a death sentence…I am conscious that he says he was not exonerated because the system worked but because of a series of miracles,” noted the UN chief.

In an interview with the UN News Centre, Mr. Bloodsworth indeed said he was saved by a series of miracles. He had survived the terrible ordeal “spending a total of 8 years 10 months and 19 days in prison for a crime I did not commit” – through faith in himself “and my belief that I knew I was an innocent person, and at the end of the day, the truth came out.

Asked why he was personally against the death penalty, Mr. Bloodworth replied: “[It’s very simple: if it can happen to me it can happen to anyone; in America or anywhere. What I’m saying is that an innocent person can be executed and that should never happen. If it can happen to me it can happen to anybody anywhere in the world.”

Ahead of the launch, the book’s editor, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonović, said in 1975, about 97 per cent of countries were executing criminals 2015, but only 27 per cent of countries that hand down the death penalty.

But Mr. Šimonović said that in 2014, there had unfortunately been a 28 per cent increase in the number of people condemned to death and also noted that one of the biggest drawbacks of death penalties is the “wrongful conviction” of suspects.

The Secretary-General today seized on the phenomenon today, saying “there will always be wrongful convictions – but when States impose the death penalty in such cases, they also kill any hope for justice.”

And he also spoke of the “harsh reality” that the death penalty discriminates. Study after study proves that if you are poor, minority or mentally disabled, you are at higher risk regardless of guilt or innocence.”

“When we safeguard the human rights of the most vulnerable, we promote more peaceful, just and stable conditions for all,” he said.
“I will never stop calling for an end to the death penalty,” Mr. Ban said, noting that “no one has proven that the death penalty even deters crime.”

“This book contains a great deal of information – but it makes no prediction on when the death penalty will be abolished globally. That is up to us. Let us write a new chapter so that the next edition may treat the death penalty the way we now treat public executions – as an aberration that is shunned in our world,” the Secretary-General concluded.

**More funds needed to cope with 5,000 daily refugee arrivals as winter hits Europe – UN agency**

5 November - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today appealed to donors for more than $95 million to make sure emergency shelters are equipped with heating and ensure other measures are in place to protect from the harsh winter weather the unrelenting flow of refugees and migrants arriving in Greece and travelling through the Balkan countries.

“UNHCR’s new winter plan anticipates that there could be up to 5,000 arrivals per day from Turkey between November 2015 and February 2016,” the agency said in a press release.

The Winterization Plan for the Refugee Crisis in Europe focuses on putting in place measures to support affected countries such as Croatia, Greece, Serbia, Slovenia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in order to avert the risk of humanitarian tragedy and loss of life during the winter months, according to the agency.

UNHCR said it will work on preparing, adapting and upgrading existing shelter and reception facilities for winter and supplying emergency shelters such as family tents, refugee housing units and Rubb halls equipped with heating.

Winter clothing and blankets, as well as other essential items for protecting people from the elements, will be included in the aid packages to be distributed to individuals with specific needs, it said.

The refugee agency said it will also work to ensure that water supply systems and sanitation facilities do not freeze and provide adequate heated structures for toilets, showers, wash basins and laundry facilities.

And because there remain long stretches of roads that refugees and migrants may have to walk, “should government authorities or other partners not be in a position to provide alternative arrangements, as an interim measure, UNHCR said it will consider providing transportation to reception centres to expedite access by refugees and asylum-seekers to assistance and protection services.”

“Harsh weather conditions in the region are likely to exacerbate the suffering of the thousands of refugees and migrants landing in Greece and travelling through the Balkans, and may result in further loss of life if adequate measures are not taken urgently,” UNHCR said.

The $96.15 million appeal brings UNHCR’s total supplementary requirements to $172,724,529.
Political progress in Libya ‘carries promise’ of ending impunity for atrocity crimes – ICC Prosecutor

5 November - After a “seemingly endless cycle of violence,” Libya’s incessant conflict and political division may soon come to an end, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) told the United Nations Security Council today, noting that significant progress is being made towards achieving the goal of peace and stability in the country.

“The ongoing national dialogue facilitated by the United Nations, towards the establishment of a Libyan Government of National Accord represents hope for transition to national unity and durable peace,” said ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, as she presented her latest report on the situation in the country to the Council.

She added that the UN-supported exercise carries the important promise for Libya's efforts in the promotion of the rule of law, the protection of civilians and the ending of impunity for atrocity crimes.

The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), she continued, had facilitated successful talks towards the resolution of the Tawergha issue, during the course of which the Misrata/Tarwergha Joint Committee also affirmed its full support to the political dialogue and the formation of a Government of National Accord and establish the rule of law, end the conflict and safeguard Libyan unity.

“The era of accountability and rule of law, on which to build the future of the country, may indeed be within reach for the Libyan people. We, as a collective, cannot fail the people of Libya by standing idly by as the country degenerates into chaos and further instability,” she emphasized.

She further stressed the importance of undertaking investigations with respect to the ongoing atrocity crimes in Libya and called for additional support from the support of the Security Council.

“I equally and strongly invite the Council to seriously consider assisting the Office [of the Prosecutor], in accordance with article 115(b) of the Rome Statute, to obtain the resources required for the effective investigations of alleged crimes committed in a situation that has been referred to the Court by this august body,” said Ms. Bensouda.

She also recalled that the Appeals Chamber of the ICC affirmed the admissibility of the case against Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi, and the inadmissibility of the case against Abdullah Al-Senussi.

“The Libyan authorities must heed the Council's calls for cooperation and comply with the Court’s request to immediately surrender Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi to the ICC,” urged Ms. Bensouda, stating that earlier this year, the Tripoli Court of Assize sentenced both Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi and Abdullah Al-Senussi, among other co-defendants, to death for the crimes they allegedly committed during Libya's 2011 uprising.

At the same time, Ms. Bensouda said that ICC continues to monitor the situation in Libya and added that she is concerned that large scale crimes, including those of the ICC jurisdiction are being committed by all parties in the conflict.

“I remain equally concerned that all sides including the Libyan National Army (LNA), Libya Dawn, and the so called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL; and their respective allies, and international actors continue to commit attacks resulting in civilian casualties,” she stressed.

She said that of the reported 634 separate incidents, a total of 1,539 violent deaths were recorded, Total numbers of violent deaths have seen an average monthly increase in 2015. Civilian deaths have fluctuated, though no less than 60 per month have been recorded this year alone. She added that during the reporting period there have also been a high number of civilian deaths attributed to ISIL and its allies.
“I reiterate here my Office's willingness and commitment to undertake further investigations in Libya, but stress once again the need for States Parties, and the Council, to ensure adequate funding to my Office for this purpose,” said Ms. Bensouda.

She also reiterated her previous calls to Member States, non-Member States and international organization to assist Libya in strengthening its national capacity to respond to Rome Statute crimes through the formation of an international contact group on justice issues.

Ms. Bensouda restated the support of her Office to the efforts of the Libyan Government and its international partners to “address impunity in Libya and reaffirms its commitment in the dialogue with this Council on that mission.”

“Ending impunity for atrocity crimes in Libya is an important goal that is both achievable and necessary for sustainable peace and stability in the country. It is also a goal that can only be met through the joint action, commitment and substantial support of all the relevant actors,” said Ms. Bensouda.

 Trafficking in cultural property ‘source of enormous illicit profits,’ UN official tells forum

5 November - Trafficking in cultural property has increasingly come to the attention of the international community and represents a source of enormous illicit profits, an official from UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stressed today at a special event in St. Petersburg, Russia.

“In recent years, the world has witnessed the growing involvement of violent extremists and terrorists in the destruction, looting, trafficking and sale of cultural property, in complicity with organized criminal groups,” John Brandolino, the Director of UNODC’s Division for Treaty Affairs, told delegates attending a special event of the world’s largest anti-corruption forum.

“The challenges presented by this phenomenon are complex and multi-faceted, and clearly require responses at the national level as well as strong regional and international cooperation to meet them,” he added.

Mr. Brandolino said UNODC is honoured to be part of the global initiative recently launched at UN Headquarters in New York to protect cultural heritage and mobilize the international community against the trafficking and destruction of cultural property by terrorist groups and organized criminal networks.

“There is also growing awareness and evidence of the increasing involvement of organized criminal groups in the looting, trafficking and sale of cultural property,” he explained. “Such groups are also often involved in other types of crimes, such as illicit arms and drug trafficking, money-laundering, corruption and terrorism financing.”

According to UNODC, proceeds of transnational crime related to art and cultural property may amount to some 0.8 per cent of all illicit financial flows, between 3.4 and 6.3 billion dollars every year.

“Trafficking in cultural property is also used to launder the proceeds of crime, and has been identified as a source of financing for terrorist acts,” Mr Brandolino added. “This is clearly an urgent threat requiring the attention of the international community.”

In addition, he noted that there have been some relatively recent pronouncements on this subject by the UN community, including at the 13th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, held in Doha in April, as well as by the Security Council through a number of resolutions.

Meanwhile, he recalled that both the UN and the international community have some existing tools and frameworks available, such as the Hague convention of 1954, the UN Convention Against Corruption and the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.
In conclusion, Mr. Brandolino emphasized the importance of getting all organizations and national authorities represented at the forum to work together in addressing the challenges posed by the looting, trafficking and sale of cultural property.

**UN envoy welcomes commitment by rebel group in Colombia to end child recruitment**

5 November - The United Nations Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui today welcomed as “an important step” the commitment by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP) to stop the recruitment and use of children.

The group also declared their willingness to release children under 15 present in their ranks, according to a press release issued by her Office.

“This is an important step to protect the children of Colombia and to bring the FARC-EP’s recruitment practices in line with national and international law. I look forward to seeing this commitment implemented through command orders disseminated widely within the ranks of the FARC-EP,” Ms. Zerrougui said.

The commitment was expressed during the Special Representative’s second visit to Havana, Cuba from 30 October to 3 November to discuss the fate of children affected by the armed conflict with the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP – the two negotiating parties to the Colombian peace talks.

Today, she “reminded the negotiating parties that international standards and the best interest of the child must be the guiding principles to ensure that the reintegration services offered truly address the needs of the children released, including girls, orphans or those coming from Afro and indigenous communities.”

“I am looking forward to seeing the first children released as soon as possible and confirm that the UN stands ready to support the separation and reintegration of all children under 18 present in the ranks of the FARC-EP,” Ms. Zerrougui said.

The envoy said she is pleased that the issue of children is at the heart of the peace process and hopes that the negotiations will bring about a brighter future for all children in Colombia.
UN symposium in Uganda focuses on revitalizing global partnership for sustainable development

5 November - Speaking at a symposium on the revitalization of a global partnership for sustainable development, top United Nations officials dealing with economic and social issues today stressed the importance of building trust, cultivating leadership and adjusting policies to achieve the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“We have before us the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted just over a month ago in New York,” the current President of the UN Economic and Social Council, Oh Joon, told delegates attending the two-day Development Cooperation Forum on the shores of Lake Victoria in Kampala, Uganda.

The Development Cooperation Forum Uganda High-level Symposium provides a first opportunity for the range of actors to discuss development cooperation for the 2030 Agenda: ways to motivate, support and further shape development cooperation as a critical ‘means of implementation.’ Particular attention will be placed on what this means in terms of challenges and opportunities for development cooperation in Africa.

“The Agenda calls for concerted efforts to realize sustainable development for all societies, leaving no one behind. It resonates greatly with the realities and ambitions of all people, especially those in vulnerable and fragile situations,” continued Mr. Oh.

Mr. Oh, who is also the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, noted that the 17 global goals included in the Agenda will come to guide national policy, budget and international development cooperation.

“Our job at the global level, which I represent here today as President of ECOSOC, is to support this effort at translation and alignment at all levels, especially in this early implementation phase,” he noted.

ECOSOC, he explained will lead in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and its financing framework at global level.

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, under ECOSOC auspices, and, every fourth year, under the auspices of the General Assembly, will review progress toward the 2030 Agenda. It will be informed by voluntary and country-led reviews, based on a global SDG indicator framework. This framework will be proposed by the UN Statistical Commission by March 2016 and then put to the Council and Assembly for adoption.

Meanwhile, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Wu Hongbo, said “it is fitting” to be holding the Development Cooperation Forum on the “fastest growing continent in the world.”

“The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals demands solidarity and the policies that are fit for the scale and scope of the 2030 Agenda,” said Mr. Wu.

“You have gathered here as distinguished policy makers and practitioners in development cooperation. The Development Cooperation Forum offers the platform for all actors, public and private, North and South, to learn and exchange.”

He added that discussions at the Forum should yield concrete recommendations that the international community can bring to practice in its work.

According to the UN, the Symposium, which wraps up on 6 November, will feed preparations for the 2016 high-level meeting of the Development Cooperation Forum and other functions of ECOSOC, which has the lead role in the follow-up
of the 2030 Agenda at global level.

**Adverse weather pushes global food prices up by 3.9 per cent in October, says UN agency**

5 November - Weather-driven concerns about sugar and palm oil supplies have led to price increase of major food commodities in October, said Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today.

The FAO Food Outlook released today said that its Food Price Index averaged nearly 162 points in October, up 3.9 per cent from September, while still down 16 per cent from a year earlier.

The latest Cereal Supply and Demand Brief of the UN agency slightly reduced its forecast for global cereal production in October 2015 and now projects production at 2.53 billion tonnes, 1.1 per cent below last year’s record output.

FAO said that the reduction reflects dimmer expectations about maize crops in India and Ukraine, mostly due to adverse weather.

Additionally, the UN agency said that drought in Thailand prompted a plummeted projection of the seasonal rice harvest.

FAO also said that the forecast for global wheat production has been raised, largely reflecting a bigger harvest in the European Union than earlier anticipated.

The UN agency also expects would cereal stocks to remain at a good level as global wheat inventories are rising further, reaching their highest level in 15 years.

The FAO’s Sugar Price Index led the overall rise, surging 17.2 per cent from September due to fears that excessive rains in Brazil would impact sugarcane harvests backed by reports of drought in India and Thailand adding that the sharp jump reversed the sub-index’s decline since February.

The UN food agency also reported a 6.2 per cent increase in the FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index as concerns intensify over the impact of El Niño on next year’s palm oil supply in Indonesia, couples with coupled with slow progress in soybean plantings in Brazil, due also to unfavourable weather.

Further, FAO reported that the Dairy Price Index rose 9.4 per cent from September on concerns that milk output in New Zealand would decline but added that the Meat Price Index remained stable.

Additionally, the report also found that the Cereal Price Index also surged by a modest 1.7 per cent, mainly due to growing concerns over dry weather conditions affecting wheat crops in Ukraine and southern parts of the Russian Federation.

The FAO 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.
UN-supported toll-free hotline aims to help tackle gender-based violence in Somalia

5 November - A United Nations-backed toll free hotline has been launched for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Somalia to tackle sexual violence by enhancing timely response to abuse cases and offering information on accessible health services.

Hotline 5555, nicknamed Ceebla meaning ‘no shame’ in Somali, was initiated in October by the Somali Women’s Development Centre (SWDC), with the support of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), several UN agencies and non-profit organizations, according to an UNSOM press release issued earlier this week.

“More importantly, we are also sharing with them information on services available for victims of gender-based violence, which includes domestic violence and rape,” said UNSOM Human Rights Officer Abdinasir Moallin during a training session meant to sensitize IDPs on the rights and services available to victims of gender-based violence.

Aiming to improve timely report to the authorities and their response time to handle abuse cases, the hotline also helps make health service accessible to the victims, such as providing information on emergency medical services.

Of great importance, one Somali official stated, is that the hotline breaks the cultural taboo as most sexual violence was unreported due to stigmatization and regarded normal.

Moreover, it offers a platform for the vulnerable group with legal and social support, urging them seeking justice with the help of police.

“We received training on human rights and gender-based violence, which we will share with our people in the camps,” Fartun Hassan Hussein, an IDP representative at the training, applauded the hotline launch to curb the rampant gender-based violence in the camps.

Bangladesh: UN rights chief calls for protection of writers, publishers threatened by extremists

5 November - In the wake of recent violence against publishers, writers, bloggers and civil society groups by extremists in Bangladesh, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights today condemned the acts and urged the Government to take “urgent, concerted measures to ensure the protection of all those who are being threatened by extremists operating in the country.”

“At least five Bangladeshi writers and publishers as well as two foreign aid workers have been violently murdered this year in Dhaka and many more attacked and threatened, apparently by groups that believe they have the right to impose their views on others through wanton violence,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said in a statement.

According to the High Commissioner’s Office (OHCHR), last Saturday, publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan was hacked to death in his office in Dhaka, and in a separate incident, three people at another publishing house in the city were reportedly wounded.

The UN rights office said that Mr Dipan had published the work of a prominent blogger, Avjit Roy, who himself was
hacked to death in February this year.

“There is an urgent need for a concerted response to prevent more killings by promptly bringing the perpetrators to justice, and by taking effective measures to protect writers, publishers and any other people in Bangladesh who are being threatened with violence. The State must not allow extremist groups to take matters into their own hands,” declared Mr. Zeid.

OHCHR reports that three other bloggers were also murdered this year for writing about sensitive social, political and religious issues and added that many others have received threats on social media, where a hit-lists targeting writers are being circulated.

According to OHCHR, this has prompted some of those threatened to flee the country or go into hiding.

“I urge political and religious leaders to consistently and unequivocally condemn this spate of vicious killings and threats against writers and publishers and anyone else who may be targeted by these takfiri groups,” Mr. Zeid said.

Lastly, he also stressed that the Government must ensure that journalists, civil society actors and human rights defenders are able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and opinion without fear for their safety.

“When people have been explicitly threatened with violence or murder, it is the duty of the State to provide them with effective protection,” the High Commissioner said.

Ban welcomes decision by Turkey to provide access to burial sites in north of Cyprus

5 November - Following a confirmation from the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, Mr. Mustafa Akinci, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the decision by Turkey to allow access to the Committee on Missing Persons excavation teams, to 30 suspected burial sites in the military areas in the north of Cyprus.

“The Secretary-General is encouraged by the steps being taken to build trust and confidence between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities as the two sides have begun intensified talks this month,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.

The UN chief added that the UN remains committed to supporting both leaders “in the talks aimed at achieving a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus.”

Ukraine: UN humanitarian chief calls for urgent, sustained access to vulnerable communities in east

5 November - Wrapping up a three-day visit to Ukraine, the United Nations humanitarian chief is calling for sustained and unimpeded access to the vulnerable communities caught in the middle of the crisis and who urgently need humanitarian aid.

“I came to Ukraine to see for myself the consequences of the conflict in eastern areas for the civilians living there and those who have been forced to flee,” the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien, said in a press release issued in Kyiv yesterday at the end of his visit.

“As the winter fast approaches, our top priority must be to quickly scale up the coordination and delivery of aid for the most vulnerable people, especially the elderly and ill,” he added.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which Mr. O’Brien heads, around four
million people in eastern Ukraine need assistance and protection. Families do not have access to basic supplies and services, including food, clean water supply, and heating fuel.

“Many people, especially those who have not been able to flee to safe areas because they are elderly or sick, are living in homes which, as I saw when I met an elderly woman in Tsentralniye, have been severely damaged in the fighting. People are not able to move freely to seek medical assistance or make a living,” Mr. O’Brien warned.

During his visit, Mr. O’Brien, who is also the Emergency Relief Coordinator, met the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, and senior officials in the Presidential Administration in Kyiv. It was agreed that strengthening coordination and partnership to ensure that more aid can be delivered to all Ukrainians in dire need was of paramount importance.

In the eastern areas, Mr. O’Brien met representatives of the de facto authorities in Luhansk and Donetsk and discussed ways of improving humanitarian access to people in the non-Government controlled areas.

“As I met people and heard their stories, I was struck by the urgent need for greater protection and safety, as well as for basic supplies. That is why it has been important to speak to representatives of all conflict parties, who are responsible under international law for protecting and aiding civilians,” Mr. O’Brien said on his return to Kyiv.

People are reportedly getting assistance from local organizations, from other countries and from the United Nations and humanitarian partners. However, OCHA noted that it is clear that no single aid source or route will be enough to meet people’s needs this winter.

“As a result of my meetings and the welcome assurances I received, I have confidence that I can count upon all the parties to facilitate immediate, unimpeded and sustained aid delivery. We and our partners remain ready to scale up the delivery of vital aid and are activating our plan to commence the transport of some 500 metric tonnes of blankets, food, medical supplies and shelter repair materials for people in the Luhansk area in the next few days,” announced Mr. O’Brien.

“As impartial, neutral and independent humanitarians, we will continue to coordinate with all parties so that we can get to the people who need help, urge all sides to allow free movement of civilians and aid workers, and to mobilize further funds to enable this critical work,” he added.

The Under-Secretary-General also noted that the UN “must do more to tell the world of the human suffering in the conflict areas.” He said international attention has been largely focused on the military and political situation in Ukraine, whereas “above all, peace and stability are what the Ukrainian people need.”