Yemen: UN envoy sets out on ‘intensive consultation’ aimed at getting political process back on track

6 May - The United Nations Special Envoy on Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, is conducting intensive consultations aimed at getting the political process back on track for the country, where conflict erupted in late March.

Starting the process with a visit to Paris, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed met officials from the Office of the French President and the Foreign Ministry, as well as the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperative Council.

Tomorrow, the Special Envoy will travel to Saudi Arabia’s capital, Riyadh, for meetings with President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, Vice President Khaled Bahah and other Yemeni officials, as well as with Saudi officials. The plan is to travel from Riyadh to other regional capitals for further consultations.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed was in New York until yesterday, where he met with permanent representatives from key countries in the region and members of the Security Council.

Meanwhile, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that widespread violence has intensified in Aden Governorate, with reports of heavy shelling and clashes taking place in seven districts, especially heavy in Khормaskar district, and of airstrikes in Sa’ada today.

Today, for the first time, clashes were reported in Attawahi District, where parties to the conflict were reportedly shooting at residents attempting to leave and shelling the boat in which they were trying to escape. Several hundred families have managed to flee to other parts of Aden Governorate by boat.
Residents also report a lack of food, water, fuel and breakdown of basic services in both Aden and Sa’ada Governorates, with several districts in Aden Governorate completely cut off.

Figures from 26 March up to 3 May from the field show that at least 646 civilians have been killed, including 50 women and 131 children, and more than 1,364 civilians have been injured, according to the UN human rights office (OHCHR).

**INTERVIEW: As Liberia moves past Ebola ‘nightmare,’ security and political challenges still ahead, UN envoy cautions**

6 May - As Liberia bounces back from the “national nightmare” of a devastating Ebola epidemic which claimed more than 4,000 lives, the country must also prepare for a series of future challenges – from the build-up of its security sector to the undertaking of critical presidential elections in 2017, according to Karin Landgren, the head of the United Nations Mission there (UNMIL).

On the heels of her presentation of the Secretary-General’s latest report on UNMIL to the Security Council, Ms. Landgren voiced optimism that the West African nation had weathered the worst of the Ebola crisis as the number of confirmed cases has now dwindled to zero and the nationwide panic has stabilized.

The UNMIL head spoke with the *UN News Service* earlier today about her hopes and fears for Liberia ahead of the UN Mission’s impending drawdown.

**UN News Service:** Thank you for speaking to us. First off, would you say the Ebola epidemic is under control in Liberia?

**Karin Landgren:** As we speak, we’re just three days away from the anticipated announcement by the World Health Organization (WHO) that Liberia is Ebola-free. And [the agency] will make that announcement if no new case is confirmed by Saturday. So this is so eagerly anticipated. It’s been 14 months of a national nightmare, at times. Especially last August, when the country felt like it was teetering on the brink and panic was rising; anger was rising. And no one had seen an epidemic like this before. It was very hard to know what to do.

So, at this point, it does appear to be under control in Liberia but WHO has also been careful to say that until it’s gone from the region as a whole, there are still risks – there are risks that it can come back. So we await Sierra Leone’s and Guinea’s conquering of Ebola as well.

**UN News Service:** The [Secretary-General’s] report underlines how Ebola ‘threatened to reverse all that Liberia had achieved since the war ended in 2003.’ To what extent did the UN prevent this from happening?

**Karin Landgren:** The UN and other partners recognized quite early on that this was more than a public health crisis. Certainly, health services collapsed almost immediately. But there were immediate risks to public security. Commodity prices grew and people became restive about that. There was a state of emergency; the army was called out. I’m convinced that the continued presence of UNMIL was reassuring for the population and the fact that we have offices all over the country actually contributed to convening the actors who needed to come together.

But I have to pay tribute to the extraordinary non-governmental organizations (NGOs), beginning with MSF [Médecins Sans Frontières], who contributed to reversing this and all the partner governments, particularly the [United States], who threw resources at it. It was a real collective effort recognizing that no one had seen a problem on this scale before: Ebola in an urban centre where it spread like wildfire.

**UN News Service:** The report mentions an ‘erosion of public trust’ in the Liberian Government. Does the UN have a role to play in helping Liberians regain that trust?

**Karin Landgren:** The top responsibility for building confidence in the Government and Government institutions lies with the Government. People need to see the Government present all over the country, which it’s not. It’s a very centralized
Government. And they need to have adequate service delivery – whether we are talking about justice, security or health care. It’s going to be a long road for Liberia to establish all these services and give the population confidence in them. UNMIL can certainly help and is working very hard on the security sector in particular but this is a national challenge which will be longer in duration than the life of the peacekeeping mission.

**UN News Service:** UNMIL is preparing to withdraw over 1,200 military personnel from the Mission by September. This drawdown of staff had been suspended while Ebola presented a threat to peace and security. Is the Mission ready for this?

**Karin Landgren:** This is part of a drawdown that was planned in 2012. We need to remember that when UNMIL began in 2003, it had an authorized strength of 15,000 troops. When I came to head the Mission in 2012, we were down to 8,000. So there had already been a significant drawdown. This phase, which will take us down to about 3,600 military [personnel], was planned and is absolutely timely and appropriate. What the Security Council will be discussing in September is what comes next, including the exit strategy for the Mission.

Having surmounted Ebola, Liberia has some other challenges [ahead of it]. In October, two of the neighbouring countries are holding president elections – Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea. And it will be very important for Liberia’s stability that those elections pass off peacefully. Liberia’s own next political watershed moment is its presidential election in 2017 when President Johnson Sirleaf will step down after two terms. A lot is going to be at stake in 2017 and I have encouraged the Security Council to maintain a steady engagement and assess what is appropriate based on the facts on the ground. One Council member assured me that they would take this step-by-step.

**UN News Service:** You are serving in Liberia until July. What is your main priority for the next couple of months?

**Karin Landgren:** I’ve had the extraordinary privilege of serving in three successive peace missions, so as I get ready to leave Liberia, I’ll be doing a lot of reflection on what I’ve learned across these experiences. My immediate priority is to give maximum support from the Mission to two excellent initiatives that the Government has thrown its weight behind. And the number one priority is in strengthening Liberia’s own security sector to take over responsibilities from UNMIL. The Security Council has told Liberia that they expect a complete transition of security responsibilities from the UN to the Government by 30 June 2016. And, although at this point UNMIL only performs half a dozen tasks on behalf of the Government, it will be challenging for the Government to take over full responsibility for those. And that has to be my first priority.

World’s forcibly displaced hit record 38 million, prompting UN appeal for ‘all-out effort’ for peace

6 May - By the end of 2014, a record-breaking 38 million people had been forced to flee their homes within their own country because of conflict or violence, prompting the United Nations refugee agency to appeal today for “an all-out effort to bring about peace in war-ravaged countries.”

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) along with one of its partners, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), released these alarming figures at a joint press conference in Geneva to launch the report, Global Overview 2015: people internally displaced by conflict and violence.

The report, compiled by the NRC’s the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), revealed that 38 million people have been internally displaced by conflict or violence, the equivalent of the total populations of London, New York and Beijing combined, representing a 4.7 million increase compared to 2013.

With internal displacement figures reaching a record high for the third year in a row, the report also shows that 11 million people were newly displaced by violent events throughout 2014, which amounts to 30,000 people forcibly displaced every day.

The report showed that Syria, with 7.6 million displaced people or at least 40 per cent of its population, makes it the country
with the largest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world, and Iraq, suffered the most new displacement, with at least 2.2 million people fleeing in areas that fell under Islamic State control.

“We know that more and more internally displaced have been forced to move within their country multiple times,” said Volker Türk, UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. “The longer a conflict lasts, the more insecure [displaced persons] feel and when hopelessness sets in, many will cross borders and become refugees.”

Mr. Turk noted that “as we have seen in the recent past, for example in the Mediterranean, despair drives people to take their chances and even risk dangerous boat journeys.”

NRC Secretary-General Jan Egeland said: “This report should be a tremendous wake-up call. We must break this trend where millions of men, women and children are becoming trapped in conflict zones around the world.”

Mr. Turk agreed, saying: “The obvious solution lies in an all-out effort to bring about peace in war-ravaged countries.”

The 2015 Global Overview also highlights how long-lasting, or protracted, displacement contributes to this alarmingly high global total. In 2014, there were people living in displacement for 10 years or more in nearly 90 per cent of the 60 countries and territories monitored by the report.

The figures also shows that 60 per cent of people newly displaced were in five countries alone: Iraq, South Sudan, Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Nigeria, where Boko Haram’s campaign to control territory and impose Islamic law in north-eastern Nigeria have driven hundreds of thousands of people from their homes.

And for the first time in more than a decade, Europe had massive enforced displacement caused by the war in Ukraine, where 646,500 people fled their homes in 2014.

The report, based on data provided by governments, non-governmental organization partners and UN agencies, deals with internal displacement within the countries, and it not to be confused with UNHCR’s Global Trends Report due next month, which will focus on the number of refugees, or those who have been forced to flee their countries entirely.

**Nepal: UN labour agency set to ramp up operations in quake-hit country**

6 May - The devastating earthquake that hit Nepal two weeks ago is expected to impact one third of the country’s labour force, the Kathmandu office of the United Nations agency mandated to promote jobs and workplace rights worldwide warned today.

“We are more than ready to kick-start all the emergency works,” said Jose Assalino, Director of the International Labour Organization (ILO) office in Kathmandu.

“We will build on existing progress. We have been working [in the country]. Employment and social protection is part of the priority number one of the [ILO] country-program signed with Nepal in 2013,” he added.

Mr. Assalino said that the agency has been working on national employment policy and social security law in Nepal prior to the earthquake and has stayed active during the early recovery period. The country’s ILO office will stay committed to responding to whatever work lies ahead.

Currently, the ILO has programmes in partnership with the Government and the World Bank in 33 districts of Nepal. These districts include all those that were most affected by the earthquake.

“The ILO is working to give jobs to the people, in all those districts, to work on a permanent basis,” Mr. Assalino said in his message. “This gives us a very good platform to build the concrete actions that you want to do now to respond to the
situation.”

The work is more than “just short-term cash for work,” he said. The ILO’s efforts are also focused on the long-term, which means that successes will last based on a comprehensive maintenance program and better training. This will require the deep involvement of the Government at the national level and local level. He also emphasized the importance of ensuring sustainability and strong basis to upgrade activities.

There are currently 69 ILO engineers in the field in 33 districts. There are also 3,200 workers in the fields, working with this 33 district administrations with staff.

“We need those local administrations so it’s not something isolated in the field, an agency deploying a couple of staff to do some work in the field, we are fully integrated in the government system and this puts us in a position that I can tell you nobody else has in Nepal in this moment,” he said.

On 25 April, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake shook Nepal, killing thousands while limiting access to food and leaving some 3.5 million in need of food assistance. An estimated 8 million people across the country’s Western and Central Regions are affected by the disaster, including its largest cities, Kathmandu and Pokhara.

New UN-backed report emphasizes possible contribution of forests to ending hunger

6 May - A new United Nations-backed report on the link between forests and food production and nutrition says that woodlands could be the key to ending hunger and will be intimately linked to the global fight against climate change.

Launched today at UN Headquarters in New York, where the 11th session of the UN Forum on Forests, the Forests, Trees and Landscapes for Food Security and Nutrition report outlines the potential of forests to improve food security and nutrition, and to ensure the livelihoods of the world’s most vulnerable people.

“What the report is trying to get us to focus on is the relatively neglected contribution that forests and trees make to food security and nutrition,” said Bhaskar Vira, who serves as Chair of the Expert Panel on Forests and Food Security. “Not necessarily neglected by the people who actually consume them but possibly neglected in some of the policy discourses.”

He stressed that it was understood in the report that conventional agriculture would remain the major source of people’s nutrition needs but underlined the complementary role that forests and tree-based systems would also play in feeding the world.

“We’re not trying to suggest that forests and tree-based systems will replace agricultural in relation the critical relationship between crops and food,” said Mr. Vira. “But what we document in extensive detail is the role that forests and tree-based systems already play in supplementing people’s diets and the important roles they play in supplying people with a nutritionally balanced diet.”

Apart from the importance of forests and trees to food security and nutrition, the report’s other key messages are that integrated governance is important in the interaction between different areas of land-use, that local control of forests are vital to their well-being and to food security as a whole, and that there is a need going forward to reimagine forests and food security.

The report, which is based on existing knowledge, was put together by more than 60 renowned scientists who are part of the Global Forest Expert Panel (GFEP) on Forests and Food Security. The initiative was led by the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) – a world-wide organization devoted to forest research and related sciences, and a member of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), which is an informal arrangement among 14 international organizations and secretariats with substantial programmes on forests.
The current session of the Forest Forum is trying to forge an international forest policy for the next 15 years that will be aligned with the new sustainable development agenda expected to be adopted in September. The current integration of forests into the new agenda demonstrates the increasing recognition of the critical role forests play in eradicating poverty, as well as addressing climate change.

“Conservation of forests and arresting deforestation remains the most affordable and most interesting and valuable cost-benefit option to decrease carbon emissions,” said Manoel Sobral Filho, Director of the UN Forum on Forests Secretariat, who also stressed the how crucial the current year was as the international community discussed a new development agenda and he noted that forests were to be included in two of the proposed new sustainable development goals.

’Let us renew our will to cooperate for peace’ Ban declares at Peace Bell reinstallation ceremony

6 May - As one of the oldest outdoor gifts at the United Nations, the Peace Bell represents the “collective desire for the world to live in peace,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today at a ceremony to reinstall the symbolic bell at its permanent home at Headquarters in New York.

“I always take great inspiration whenever I pass by, and of course when we ring it each September to mark the International Day of Peace,” Mr. Ban said.

“As I remember, there was only one year we were not able to hit this Peace Bell – that was 2001 on September 11th. We were ready to have this Peace Bell ceremony on the day of the opening of the General Assembly. On that day the September 11th terrorist attacks happened, so we had to evacuate this building,” Mr. Ban recalled.

“I was serving as Chef de Cabinet to the President of the General Assembly. The [President of the] General Assembly, Secretary-General Kofi Annan and myself and all other staff had to either evacuate to the basement or outside of this building” he said.

Unlike many other gifts, the Peace Bell came to the United Nations courtesy of a non-governmental organization, the UN Association of Japan, even before Japan became a UN Member State. It was a sign of support of the goals and ideals of the Organization.

The idea for a “bell of peace,” as it was originally known, was proposed by Mr. Chiyoji Nakagawa, a representative of the UN Association of Japan who attended the General Assembly's sixth session, in 1951.

“After surviving the cruelties and deprivations of the Second World War, Mr. Nakagawa wanted to create a symbol for humanity's hopes for global peace,” Mr. Ban said.

For five years, as the United Nations renovated its Headquarters complex along Manhattan's East River, the Peace Bell found a temporary home in the Rose Garden. It is currently placed at the intersection of the General Assembly, Secretariat, and Conference buildings.

“Over the last five years that the Peace Bell was away, too many innocent people around the world have heard only the sounds of guns and bombs,” Mr. Ban said.

“Now that it is restored back to its home, let us also intensify our work to restore the bells of peace in villages and cities and countries around the world,” he added.

Also speaking at today's ceremony was President of the General Assembly Sam Kutesa who called the Peace Bell both unique and emblematic, having been cast using coins collected by the United Nations Association of Japan from children of all existing UN Member States in 1952.
“Today, as we return this prominent icon of peace to its permanent location, let us recall the Declaration on the Rights of Peoples to Peace, adopted thirty years ago by the General Assembly,” Mr. Kutesa said.

The Declaration reaffirmed that the aspiration for peace is universal among all peoples and that every human being has the right to live in a peaceful environment.

“Each time we ring this bell in the future, we should recall our commitment towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the building of lasting peace,” he added.

Yesterday the Secretary-General and General Assembly President planted the ‘Tree of Unity and Peace’ at Headquarters marking the end of the Second World War. Later that morning, General Assembly held a solemn ceremony remembering all the men, women and children who lost their lives during the war.

**UN deplores deadly attack on ‘blue helmets’ in DR Congo**

*6 May* - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has strongly condemned the killing of two United Nations peacekeepers and the wounding of thirteen others in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) following an ambush in the North Kivu region, a spokesperson for the Organization has confirmed.

The deadly attack occurred yesterday in Beni territory when a UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) convoy came under fire from suspected Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). Along with the documented 15 casualties, another four ‘blue helmets’ – all from the United Republic of Tanzania – are reported missing.

In a statement released yesterday evening, the UN spokesperson said the Secretary-General also condemned in the strongest terms “the continuing atrocities perpetrated by the ADF against defenseless civilians in the Beni area.”

“The UN remains committed to taking all necessary actions in line with Security Council resolution 2211 (2015) to protect civilians and neutralize armed groups in eastern DRC,” the statement continued. “The Secretary-General offers his sincere condolences and sympathy to the bereaved families and the Government of Tanzania.”

Yesterday's deadly ambush follows another targeted attack against the UN presence in the area when, on the morning of 4 May, MONUSCO helicopters were fired upon by a group of unidentified armed men.

Also condemning the 5 May attack via Twitter, Martin Kobler, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), said he would “no longer tolerate any more of these repeated attacks in Beni territory” and that MONUSCO would lead “robust offensive operations” against the perpetrators.

In addition, Mr. Kobler paid tribute to the Tanzanian peacekeepers killed in the ambush saying he was “deeply saddened” by their deaths.

Later in the afternoon, the Security Council released a statement condemning the attack and expressed their deepest condolences to the families of the peacekeepers killed.

Wishing a speedy recovery to all those injured, Council members called on the Government of the DRC to swiftly investigate this attack and bring its perpetrators to justice. Those responsible for the attack must be held accountable, the Council stressed.

The 15-member body also underlined that attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute war crimes under international law and reiterated their full support to Mr. Kobler and MONUSCO to implement their mandate.
“The members of the Security Council reiterated their deep concern regarding the security crisis in eastern DRC due to ongoing destabilizing activities of foreign and domestic armed groups,” the statement read.

UN rights experts urge Nauru to set up monitoring body for asylum-seekers detained on island

6 May - A group of United Nations human rights experts today called on Nauru to set up an independent monitoring body to ensure that the country meets its obligations to treat people in detention correctly.

During a three-day visit to Nauru, members of the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT) visited Nauru’s police station and prison, as well as the Regional Processing Center (RPC) for asylum-seekers, a large facility comprising three separate units housing men, women and families with children who have been attempting to reach Australia.

“We were pleased to be able to visit all places of deprivation of liberty on the island,” said Malcolm Evans, the chair of the SPT and head of the three-member delegation, which also included experts, June Lopez and Nora Sveaass.

The SPT monitors how States that have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) are meeting their treaty obligations, which include setting up a monitoring body known as a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM). Nauru became a party to OPCAT in January 2013 and an NPM should have been in place one year after that.

“Given the number of people currently being held on the island, the establishment of an NPM to address their needs and their situation becomes even more pressing,” said Mr. Evans, who indicated that the delegation was encouraged to receive assurances from the Government of Nauru that such a mechanism would be established as soon as possible.

“The SPT would be pleased to respond to any request by the Government of the Republic of Nauru for assistance,” said Mr. Evans. “It is, of course, essential that this mechanism is able to operate effectively and independently in all facilities on the island.”

Discovery of bodies in smuggler’s camp in Thailand prompts UN call for joint action against people trafficking

6 May - The United Nations refugee agency today expressed its deep concern over the discovery of dozens of bodies in smugglers’ camps in Thailand, appealing for a regional effort to end human trafficking and protect those who escape difficult conditions from “the hands of ruthless smugglers.”

“It’s distressing to hear that people who escaped difficult conditions back home have had to put their lives in the hands of ruthless smugglers, only to be killed before they could reach safety,” said James Lynch, Regional Representative and Regional Coordinator for South-East Asia for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The agency says it has been helping the Thai authorities to care for people of concern who are caught in these situations.

According to UNHCR, its staff assists people rescued in law enforcement raids from the smugglers’ camps by providing immediate relief such as clothes, blankets and hygiene kits, and also conduct interviews, help reunite families who were split during the journey, provide counseling support and identify possibilities of resettlement to third countries for the most vulnerable people.

Thai authorities announced this week that they found the remains of some 30 people believed to originate in Myanmar and...
Bangladesh, according to a UNHCR press release issued in Bangkok, Thailand.

“Investigations are still ongoing, with initial police accounts citing illness and abuse as likely causes of death,” according to UNHCR.

In Myanmar’s Rakhine state – where many of the smuggling victims originate – UNHCR has long advocated for and stands ready to support concerted efforts to stabilize the situation through the realization of rights for all, reconciliation, socio-economic equality and addressing issues related to citizenship.

But the refugee agency said: “This is the first time that graves of a large number of people believed to be of concern to UNHCR have been identified.”

UNHCR says it has learned from hundreds of Rohingya survivors about horrific abuse and deprivation by smugglers on boats in the Bay of Bengal and in camps along the Thai-Malaysian border, including some who reported they saw people dying from beatings and lack of food.

“These findings have been shared with governments to advocate for urgent action,” the agency said.

In Malaysia, UNHCR also conducts protection monitoring in Rohingya communities and intervenes for the release of new maritime arrivals known to be in detention.

Mr. Lynch said human smuggling is a regional problem that requires a joint effort.

“Smuggling is a regional problem that requires coordinated efforts by countries in the region, including countries of origin, transit and destination,” he said. “Law enforcement measures must be accompanied by efforts to reduce the need for migrants and refugees to turn to smugglers in the first place, including by addressing the root causes driving people to undertake these dangerous journeys.”