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Ban outraged by ‘horrendous and cold-blooded’ attack on French magazine

7 January - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today strongly condemned the appalling and “cold-blooded crime” committed by terrorists who attacked the French magazine Charlie Hebdo, which news reports indicate killed 10 media workers and two police officers.

“I am appalled and deeply shocked by the attack against Charlie Hebdo in Paris this morning,” Mr. Ban said. “This act of violence can in no way be justified. This is an attack against freedom of expression and freedom of the press - the two pillars of democracy.”

According to media reports, masked gunmen opened fire with assault rifles in the office of Charlie Hebdo in central Paris, reportedly killing four of the magazine’s cartoonists and its editor. The unidentified gunmen were reported to have then fled the scene, exchanging shots with police in the street, killing two officers.

In remarks delivered during a New Year visit to the UN Correspondents Association, the Secretary-General extended his deepest condolences to the families of the victims, stressed his solidarity with the Government and people of France and said he trusted the French authorities to do all in their power to bring the perpetrators to justice quickly.

“This horrific attack is meant to divide. We must not fall into that trap,” he said. “This is a moment for solidarity. Around the world, we must stand strong for freedom of expression and tolerance and stand against forces of division and hate.”

Mr. Ban’s comments were echoed by other senior officials from across the Organization, with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, also speaking out against what he described as an “appalling and ruthless attack,” while underlining the importance of arresting and punishing those responsible and refraining from attaching blame to any wider group.
“If this attack is allowed to feed discrimination and prejudice, it will be playing straight into the hands of extremists whose clear aim is to divide religions and societies. With xenophobia and anti-migrant sentiments already on the rise in Europe, I am very concerned that this awful, calculated act will be exploited by extremists of all sorts.”

He stressed that freedom of expression and opinion are cornerstones of any democratic society and said those trying to divide communities on grounds of religion, ethnicity or any other reason must not be allowed to succeed.

Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), also said she was horrified by the “attack against the media and against freedom of expression.”

Ms. Bokova's statement said she was horrified by the incident, which was more than a “personal tragedy” and which provided more motivation to bring the perpetrators to justice.

“UNESCO is more determined than ever to protect the free and independent press,” she said. “The international community cannot let extremists sow terror and prevent the free flow of opinions and ideas.”

Later in the day, UNESCO announced that it had lowered the flag to half-mast at its Paris headquarters in solidarity with France, and in respect for those killed and injured. Mr. Bokova paid homage to the 12 victims of the “savage attack,” including four renowned cartoonists, Georges Wolinski, Jean Cabut (Cabu), Bernard Verlhac (Tignous) and Stephane Charbonnier (Charb).

“Never before has one media outlet been so deliberately targeted and its staff decimated in an act of such extreme violence,” the Director-General said. “Today’s unprecedented and horrifying attack is a tragic reminder to us all that the right to freedom of expression is fragile, and that those who defend it may pay the ultimate price for doing so.”

“At the same time, the spontaneous demonstrations that this appalling crime has provoked across France and around the world - the outpouring of sorrow and anger expressed by citizens from all faiths - also reveal that freedom of expression is a right that is cherished, and understood by all as being at the heart of healthy, functioning societies,” Ms. Bokova said.

In a statement issued by the President of the General-Assembly, Sam Kutesa, he condemned the attack in the strongest terms, underlining the need for every effort to be made to ensure that journalists can do their work in a safe and enabling environment and that crimes against them are prosecuted.

The members of the Security Council called the terrorist attack “barbaric and cowardly” and condemned the “intolerable” targeting of journalists and a newspaper in a press statement released following the attack.

“The members of the Security Council reaffirmed the need to combat by all means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts, and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed,” the statement said.
In Liberia, UN Ebola mission chief commends progress, warns against ‘complacency’

7 January - On his first tour of Ebola-stricken Liberia, the newly appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) today outlined his vision to tackle the scourge in what he called a “3C approach” which he described as recognizing the vital roles of “countries, communities and coordination.”

Briefing journalists at Spryggs Airport in Monrovia, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed described his first impression of the situation on the ground as “mixed.” On the one hand, he begins his post with “a lot of optimism,” but on the other hand, he recognizes mounting challenges to end Ebola.

“We are not yet there. There is certainly still a lot to be done for Liberia to be claimed free [of Ebola],” he said, expressing concern that successes and optimism may provoke a “degree of complacency.”

During his visit, the new UNMEER head met with the President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Minister of Health, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and the UN system which remains “quite active” on the ground. Joined by UN Special Envoy on Ebola David Nabarro, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed visited a treatment centre, as well as Grand Cape Mount, which has seen a recent flare-up of cases.

“My visit to the treatment centre has confirmed that we still have in certain places figures which for us are too high,” said Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed, as he stressed the need to “stay alert” and keep up the same degree of mobilization from the Government and international community.

In the hard-hit West African region, some 8,220 have died from the Ebola outbreak, according to the latest figures from the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

Ebola response is and should be a “Government-driven battle” as it is “about their people, about the fate of their country,” UNMEER’s chief told reporters. Recognizing the role of countries is crucial as is supporting the grassroots efforts of stricken communities.

“If we do not tackle this at the community level, there will be no zero-Ebola achievement. The community leaders, religious leaders and the communities themselves must not only acknowledge the existence of Ebola but also the battle it will take to win that behavioural change against a very limited amount of time.”

He said that so far he has seen when he met survivors and leaders is that there is strong resolve there which must be “sustained and maintained.”

The last “C” of his “3C approach”, which he hopes to be leading, is coordination. “There are a lot of actors coming to this, many with very good intentions. But we are too many and sometimes when there are too many cooks in the kitchen it is very difficult to get the meal out. We have to coordinate ourselves, we have to organize better,” he stressed.

At the same time, he said a lot is also owed to the Liberians themselves, “their determination, their will and their strength.”

“The Liberians have made this their battle. The people I have met with are at the community level are leaders of the communities or religious leaders, imams, church leaders. All of them have extraordinary resolve.”
Welcoming Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed to his new post, Dr. Nabarro said that this is his sixth time in West Africa since starting work as UN System Coordinator on Ebola in August. Progress has been achieved by the people and Government of Liberia, communities, first responders, doctors, nurses and other health workers. And the people who have recovered from Ebola are “now the real Ambassadors.”

“The numbers do tell an important story. In the middle of September the epidemiology said that there were about 80 new cases per day of Ebola in this country. It fluctuated and perhaps some days were worse than others. But just at the moment the figure is certainly less than five per day and possibly lower,” Dr. Nabarro explained.

The next phase is to start to look at where the virus is, find the people who are not well and support them, trace their contacts and get a much deeper understanding of the outbreak.

“This next stage is pretty difficult because the only solution for all of us is [to ensure] that Ebola is not present in humans in this region, as quickly as possible. So we really have to work together to find everybody. And there are flare-ups occurring such as in Grand Cape Mount…so we have to stay super vigilant.”

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed, who succeeds UNMEER’s inaugural chief, Anthony Banbury, is headed to Sierra Leone tomorrow and Guinea next week. Tomorrow morning UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will brief the General Assembly on his recent West Africa trip.

**UN report: 5.5 million displaced by war in first half of 2014, setting record**

7 January - War across large swathes of the Middle East and Africa in the first six months of 2014 forcibly displaced some 5.5 million people, signalling yet another record, the United Nations reported today.

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in its new Mid-Year Trends 2014 Report showcases that of the 5.5 million who were newly displaced, 1.4 million fled across international borders becoming refugees, while the rest were displaced within their own countries also known as IDPs or internally displaced persons.

That said, the new data brings the number of people being helped by UNHCR to 46.3 million as of mid-2014 – some 3.4 million more than at the end of 2013 and a new record high.

“In 2014, we have seen the number of people under our care grow to unprecedented levels. As long as the international community continues to fail to find political solutions to existing conflicts and to prevent new ones from starting, we will continue to have to deal with the dramatic humanitarian consequences,” António Guterres, head of UNHCR, said in a statement.

“The economic, social and human cost of caring for refugees and the internally displaced is being borne mostly by poor communities, those who are least able to afford it.”

Mr. Guterres explained that enhanced international solidarity is a must to avoid the risk of more and more vulnerable people being left without proper support.

Among the report’s main findings are that Syrians, for the first time, have become the largest refugee population under UNHCR’s mandate, overtaking Afghans, who had held that position for more than three decades.

As of June 2014, the three million Syrian refugees now account for 23 per cent of all refugees being helped by UNHCR worldwide.

Despite dropping to second place, the 2.7 million Afghan refugees worldwide remain the largest protracted refugee population under UNHCR care. Following that, the leading countries of origin of refugees are Somalia (1.1 million), Sudan
(670,000), South Sudan (509,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (493,000), Myanmar (480,000) and Iraq (426,000).

Pakistan, which hosts 1.6 million Afghan refugees, remains the biggest host country in absolute terms. Other countries with large refugee populations are Lebanon (1.1 million), Iran (982,000), Turkey (824,000), Jordan (737,000), Ethiopia (588,000), Kenya (537,000) and Chad (455,000).

Relative to the sizes of their populations, Lebanon and Jordan host the largest number of refugees, while relative to the sizes of their economies the burdens carried by Ethiopia and Pakistan are greatest.

Another major finding in the report is the shift in the regional distribution of refugee populations from Asia and the Pacific and now as a result of the crisis in Syria, the Middle East and North Africa.

UNHCR's *Mid-Year Trends 2014* report is based on data from governments and the organization's worldwide offices. It does not show total forced displacement globally. Those figures are presented in June each year in UNHCR's annual Global Trends Report, which as of end 2013 showed that 51.2 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide.

**In phone call with DR Congo President, Ban urges ‘decisive action’ against armed group**

**7 January** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a phone call with Democratic Republic of the Congo’s President, Joseph Kabila, today appealed for decisive action against the armed group FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), after it failed to surrender on deadline.

Mr. Ban reiterated that the FDLR has “failed to deliver on its promise to disarm and that the deadline of 2 January had expired without significant results”, according to a read-out of the phone call provided by his spokesperson during the daily press briefing at UN Headquarters this afternoon.

The Secretary-General welcomed President Kabila’s assurance that his Government is ready to take action and noted that the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) is ready to engage in operations alongside the Congolese military, also known by the French acronym FARDC.

Echoing that sentiment, UN Force Commander of MONUSCO, Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz today in an interview with *UN Radio* said that as FDLR had failed to meet its deadline to surrender voluntarily, action to force disarmament may be imminent.

“As you know, 2 January was [the deadline] for the FDLR to surrender voluntarily. Unfortunately, they didn’t meet expectations. One option is to...defeat the FDLR and to force the surrender of this group,” General dos Santos Cruz said over the phone from DRC’s capital, Kinshasa.

“It is very important for FDLR to stop its activities in the eastern part of Congo to bring stability to the region. We don’t have only FDLR as an armed group but they are very important politically and their surrender is important to stability here,” General dos Santos Cruz added.

He explained that MONUSCO and the Congolese army have joined forces to follow-up on the progress of disarming the group. An upcoming 15 January meeting with several regional organizations is expected to focus on the matter and decide what action to take.

In the meantime, General dos Santos Cruz said that the leaders of the 2,000-strong FDLR take action toward surrendering based on international negotiations.
“They need to surrender to bring more stability to the eastern part of Congo and to the whole region. If they don’t comply with that, we are ready to follow up with the political authorities and we are going start operations against them,” the General warned.

**Yemen: Ban condemns deadly attack on police academy, calls for accountability**

7 January - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned in the strongest terms today’s attack against a police academy in Yemen’s capital, Sana’a, and called for the perpetrators of the crime to be brought to justice.

According to media reports, at least 37 people were killed and 66 others injured by a bomb blast which took place early Wednesday morning as dozens of people stood in line to enrol in the police academy.

In a statement released by his spokesman this afternoon, Mr. Ban “expresses his condolences to the victims’ families and wishes a swift recover to all those wounded.”

“The Secretary-General reiterates his previous calls to all Yemenis to work together and to fight terrorism and to bring security and stability to Yemen.”

The troubled nation located in the Arab Peninsula has been plagued by months of violence despite the formation of a new Government on 7 November, with the aim of ending political turbulence and bringing about a transition towards democracy.

Later in the afternoon, the Security Council condemned the “horrrific” attack on Yemeni citizens “who sought to serve their country in public service”. The 15-member body expressed condolences to the families and friends of those killed and injured.

Council members also condemned the recent bomb attacks, in Ibb on 31 December and in Dhamar on 4 January.

Terrorism in all its forms constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, the reaffirmed, emphasizing that “any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivation.”

Underlining the need to bring perpetrators and sponsors of terrorism to justice, members urged all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with the Yemeni authorities in this regard.

This attack is just the latest in a spate of assaults including on children and a diplomatic official. On 16 December, 25 people were killed, including 15 school girls, when their bus was hit by a car bomb as it passed a checkpoint in the Yemeni province of Al Bayda, south of Sana’a. And on 03 December, several people were killed in a bomb attack at the residence of the Iranian Ambassador to Yemen.

In both instances, Mr. Ban and the UN Security Council deplored the “senseless” crimes and reiterated their condemnation of violations and abuses committed against children.

As for the diplomatic residency attack, Council members recalled the fundamental principle of the “inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises,” and the obligations on host Governments to take all appropriate steps to prevent any attack on diplomatic agents and consular officers.

This, they said, is an obligation under the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations.

Back in November, the UN human rights office decried abuses in the country, saying that it had “documented serious
violations committed by all sides” of the ongoing conflict including killing of civilians, the recruitment of children and the targeting of schools and hospitals.

**UNICEF uses electronic vouchers to give Syrian refugee children access to winter clothes**

7 January - As Jordan braces for a winter storm in the next few days, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), in partnership with the UN World Food Programme (WFP), today launched a winter cash assistance programme to provide vulnerable Syrian refugee children in Za’atari and Azraq refugee camps with monetary assistance to allow their families to buy them winter clothes.

“‘It is imperative to ensure that children are protected from the harsh weather conditions, so that they remain healthy and active, and continue to attend schooling,’” said Robert Jenkins, UNICEF’s Representative in Jordan.

A UNICEF statement said that approximately 41,000 vulnerable children under the age of 14 will be targeted with the one-time cash assistance, worth about 14 Jordanian Dinars – almost $20 each – and they will be able to buy winter clothes, such as boots, gloves, trousers, coats and scarves using the existing WFP electronic food voucher programme (e-cards).

The assistance can be redeemed in WFP-contracted supermarkets in the refugee camps until 31 January 2015 and families are being informed through text messages, posters, flyers and awareness sessions with camp community leaders that the assistance is dedicated to meeting the winter clothing needs of their children.

“When we launched the WFP e-card programme, the vision was for other relief agencies to use this platform to provide their assistance to Syrian refugees,” said Dorte Jessen, WFP Deputy Emergency Coordinator in Jordan. “We are thrilled that UNICEF will be the first agency to reach Syrian refugees with their winterization programme through WFP e-cards in existing partner shops in the camps, meeting the urgent needs of providing winter clothing at the coldest time of the year.”

**UN refugee agency, Afghan Government launch winter assistance plan to help displaced**

7 January - As the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) and its partners begin distributing cold-weather supplies to some of Kabul’s most vulnerable residents, the Agency’s representative in Kabul has warned that many people, especially children, are continuing to suffer, particularly those living in Kabul’s informal settlements.

“Whilst aid agencies, under the joint leadership of the Government of Afghanistan and OCHA [UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs], work closely to help respond to the immediate needs of the most vulnerable people, displaced families across the country as well as returnees continue to face many other complex challenges,” said Bo Schack, UNHCR Representative in Afghanistan.

Severe weather, including rain, snow and sub-zero temperatures, hit parts of Afghanistan during winter, particularly impacting the living conditions of the urban poor and the 782,000 people internally displaced by conflict in the country – a figure that includes 130,000 recorded as newly displaced in 2014.

“UNHCR hopes that the newly endorsed National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons will lead to renewed efforts to find real and long-term solutions to these displaced people,” Mr Schack said. “The longer-term reintegration of IDPs [internally displaced persons] and Afghan refugee returnees in Afghanistan requires the continued support of the Government and development agencies. A serious commitment to solving this problem is essential.”
The situation in the capital’s informal settlements remains of concern and the UNHCR joined the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) and other humanitarian partners in giving out warm clothing, heating material, kitchen-sets and dignity kits to over 2,300 internally displaced and returnee families in distribution centres in the city today.

A total of around 6,000 families in Kabul City are expected to benefit from the winterization assistance, a mix of vulnerable recently returned refugees and internally displaced people, as well as others at particular risk in the cold winter weather such as the disabled, the elderly and single mothers.

The agency’s efforts are part of a coordinated response to provide winterization assistance to over 32,000 displaced families – 225,000 individuals – across the country, with a focus on the most vulnerable people and on remote and isolated areas in the Western, Central, Central Highland, Southern and South-Eastern Regions, some of which are cut off from the rest of the country during the winter months.