In Poland, Ban commemorates 70th anniversary of the end of Second World War

7 May - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in Poland today at an event commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe, recalled the “tremendous” shared sacrifice and the huge price of victory over fascism, paid by the millions of lost lives.

“The terrible long years of World War II were a time of unspeakable atrocities, of lost faith and lost humanity,” said Mr. Ban at the ceremony held in the coastal city of Gdansk, where also had meetings with Heads of State including the Presidents of Poland and Ukraine.

“The war took a heavy toll on many countries, including all those represented here, and particularly on their youth,” he added, commending the “collective effort” and bravery that led to victory over evil and the “ultimate triumph” of ideas over tyranny.

In 1945, the United Nations was founded “on the ashes of this calamitous war.” Out of the war emerged a common resolve by the international community to come together and create an organization to foster international peace and security.

“The war shaped our mission and its lessons guide our work,” Mr. Ban emphasized, adding that the key principles of the UN Charter and all modern principles of international law were formulated as direct responses to the war. This includes principles of non-aggression, the peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for human rights.

Today’s commemoration comes at an especially crucial time for Europe as the continent faces a number of challenges that require cooperation, including in dealing with the tragic and destructive conflict in Ukraine and a number of protracted conflicts plaguing the region, Mr. Ban said.

In that regard, he welcomed the initiative of European Union to further strengthen dialogue and cooperation, including on sustainable development, climate change, human rights and conflict.
“We owe this to the generations lost in this and numerous other wars; we above all owe it to our children and future generations,” Mr. Ban said.

Since arriving in Poland earlier today, Mr. Ban met with the Poland’s President, Bronislaw Komorowski and the country’s Prime Minister, Ewa Kopacz. During the meetings, the dignitaries highlighted the shared sacrifice in the victory over fascism and exchanged views on UN-Polish cooperation particularly on climate change and on the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

At the initiative of the Polish President, the Secretary-General also took part in a trilateral meeting with President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko. During that meeting, Mr. Ban encouraged parties to the continuing conflict in Ukraine to swiftly and fully implement the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Ban also noted the urgent need for a lasting and durable ceasefire, and to advance the political elements of the agreement. He thanked both Presidents for their invitation to take part in the celebrations commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the end of World War II, in Gdansk today and in Kiev tomorrow, 08 May.

According to Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York, the Secretary-General will leave Poland for Ukraine tomorrow, before going on to Moscow later over the weekend.

‘Gruelling’ lean season ahead for areas of Sahel impacted by Boko Haram violence – UN agency

7 May - Thousands of women and children in regions where Boko Haram violence has spilled into Cameroon, Niger and Chad face a gruelling lean season and worsening malnutrition, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warned today.

“Women displaced by conflict have lost their husbands, walked for days to safety and rely on the support of already vulnerable communities,” said Denise Brown, WFP Regional Director for West Africa, stressing that “the lean season is upon us, and as local granaries are emptying, women tell of their families going hungry.”

The current lean season – when food needs among the most vulnerable are typically at their highest – which coincides with the rainy season and greatest hunger needs, is also sparking extra health risks.

According to WFP, the new displacement is being fueled by Boko Haram violence. In the past few days, thousands of people in Niger and Chad have been forced to flee their homes for safety. In Cameroon, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) has tripled in the past four months, while the number of IDPs in all three countries is nearly equal to that of Nigerian refugees.

“No one is untouched by the Boko Haram violence,” said Ms. Brown, adding that “crises involving refugees, displaced people, food and nutrition are converging on the poorest parts of West Africa.”

In the first quarter of 2015, WFP provided food to over 100,000 refugees, returnees, internally displaced and vulnerable people, and treatment to over 30,000 children and nursing mothers suffering from malnutrition in Cameroon, Niger and Chad affected by Boko Haram violence.

However, due to a lack of funding, less than half the people WFP planned to support have received life-saving assistance. In Cameroon, displaced people and host communities were without food assistance for four months. Only in April was WFP able to provide food assistance, but only to some displaced and with reduced rations.

“WFP is ready to scale up its response rapidly to meet growing needs if we have sufficient funding to do so,” said Ms. Brown, warning that “vulnerable communities in dire need of help in these three countries cannot afford to have less than half the support that they so urgently need.”
Meanwhile, WFP is concerned about the precarious nutrition situation of new arrivals in countries bordering on northern Nigeria, especially as malnutrition rate has surpassed the 15 percent emergency threshold among children under five and nursing mothers.

**Senior UN official warns of ‘widespread and systematic’ sexual violence in Syria, Iraq**

7 May - Sexual violence is being committed strategically, in a widespread and systematic manner, and with a high-degree of sophistication by most parties to the conflict in Syria and Iraq, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Bangura, said today as she briefed journalists on her “scoping mission” to the region in April.

“Women and girls are at risk and under assault at every point of their lives,” Ms. Bangura declared, emphasizing that the threat of brutality followed them “every step of the way…in the midst of active conflict, in areas under control of armed actors, at check-points and border crossings, and in detention facilities.”

Ms. Bangura’s trip lasted from 16 to 29 April and took her to Syria and Iraq, as well as to neighbouring countries of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, where she met directly with women who escaped the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) captivity and survived sexual violence.

She pointed to instances of forced, temporary and early marriage and described how such practices were encouraged for fighters as part of Jihad and used as a “protection” mechanism for families with no other means of providing for or ensuring safety of young girls. She also noted the sale of women for sex.

“Girls are literally being stripped naked and examined in slave bazaars,” she said, describing how they were “categorized and shipped naked off to Dohuk or Mosul or other locations to be distributed among ISIL leadership and fighters.”

She listed examples of the horrors suffered by women, including one who had been temporarily married over 20 times, after each occasion forced to undergo surgery to repair her virginity.

“ISIL have institutionalized sexual violence and the brutalization of women as a central aspect of their ideology and operations, using it as a tactic of terrorism to advance their key strategic objectives,” she said, going on to describe how women were promised to fighters and how ISIL raised funds through trafficking, prostitution and ransoms. Sexual violence was used to displace populations, to punish, humiliate and demoralize dissenters, to extract information for intelligence purposes and to dismantle social, familial and community structures in order to construct a new “Caliphate.”

The Special Representative said she had requested that the Security Council integrate protection and empowerment of women into its counter-terrorism response and she stated concerns about children born of rape, as they were unable to be registered. That risked creating “a generation of stateless children” who could provide fertile ground for future extremism.
Yemen: senior UN relief official urges immediate halt to attacks against civilians and aid workers

7 May - The top United Nations relief official for Yemen has voiced grave concern over reports that “scores” of civilians have been killed and injured amid ongoing fighting in the city of Aden, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“Civilians were reportedly targeted while they were trying to flee to safer areas, having been trapped in Aden with limited or no access to water, food and health care for weeks,” Johannes van der Klaauw said in a statement issued earlier this morning.

“People in Aden have endured extreme hardship as a result of conflict over the last six weeks and must be able to move to safer areas to seek medical and other assistance,” Mr. van der Klaauw continued. “Violence towards civilians and aid workers, and attacks on hospitals and other civilian infrastructure, must stop immediately.”

More than 1,400 people have been killed and 300,000 have fled their homes in nearly two months of fighting in the war-torn Gulf nation. Emergency relief and medical teams from abroad are struggling to fly in to scale-up the humanitarian operation to address the needs of increasingly vulnerable Yemenis.

Against that backdrop, insecurity and lack of fuel have limited access to and delivery of services. Partners report difficulty providing medical services as result of the current security situation and continued airstrikes targeting Haradh, Sa'ada and Sana'a. Food relief partners have reported they have had to suspend assistance in several districts due to lack of fuel.

In Aden, where violence has continued, casualties and the number of displaced continue to rise. According to a recent assessment, local authorities report that 98 per cent of Khormaksar district's 62,869 residents had left and that remaining families are trapped and awaiting secure conditions to leave. Mass displacement is also taking place in Al Muala and Aden City.

In his statement, Mr. van der Klaauw strongly urged all parties to the conflict to provide safe passage for civilians from areas of conflict and “to observe their duty to protect civilians in accordance with international humanitarian law.”

“I call on all parties to the conflict to provide rapid, safe and predictable access to all people in need in Yemen,” he added. “As an immediate measure, I repeat my call for a humanitarian pause, to be observed by all parties, to allow civilians to escape conflict areas and access basic services, and to enable humanitarian agencies to provide life-saving assistance.”
UN envoy on Syria meets Saudi minister; stresses need to involve regional actors in consultations

7 May - As part of ongoing Geneva consultations on Syria, the United Nations Special Envoy for the country, Staffan de Mistura, met today with Prince Mohammed bin Saud bin Khaled Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Information and Technology Affairs.

According to UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric, Mr. de Mistura stressed after the meeting that the opinions of Saudi Arabia had to be taken into account during the consultations because of the country’s status as an important player in the region.

“It is clear that any political process to end the Syrian conflict needs to be supported and facilitated by the regional parties,” he said, adding that Mr. de Mistura also consulted Kofi Annan, the former UN Special Envoy, to better understand the process that had led to the Geneva Communiqué.

The Communiqué was adopted after the first international meeting on the issue on 30 June 2012, and since endorsed by the UN Security Council. It lays out key steps in a process to end the violence. Among others, it calls for the establishment of a transitional governing body, with full executive powers and made up by members of the present Government and the opposition and other groups, as part of agreed principles and guidelines for a Syrian-led political transition.

The consultations between Mr. Annan and Mr. de Mistura were important to better understand the complexities and various challenges surrounding the Communiqué, which is considered a crucial tool in trying to re-commit all parties to a meaningful political process, said the spokesperson.

The Special Envoy also began consultations via telephone with several other interested parties.

At thematic debate, UN officials urge ‘cohesive, balanced’ approach to fighting world drug problem

7 May - The international community must seize the opportunity to hold open, comprehensive and in-depth discussions on the world drug problem at next year’s General Assembly special session devoted to the issue, a senior United Nations official said today amid appeals for a clampdown on transnational drug trafficking networks and their criminal offshoots.

“At the international level, the ever stronger links between transnational organized crime, terrorism and extremist violence constitute a very serious new threat,” he added.

As the international drug trade courses across continents and oceans, involving numerous partners such as organized crime syndicates and terrorist groups, it poses an increasing threat to national, regional, and international peace and security, he warned.
According to the latest World Drug Report issued by the Vienna-based UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), evidence shows that Afghan heroin is increasingly reaching new markets, such as Oceania and South-East Asia, that had been traditionally supplied from South-East Asia.

Meanwhile, as the long-established Balkan route seems to remain a corridor for the transit of Afghan heroin to the lucrative markets in Western and Central Europe, the so-called “southern route” is expanding, with heroin being smuggled through the area south of Afghanistan reaching Europe, via the Near and Middle East and Africa, as well as directly from Pakistan.

That is why, Mr. Eliasson continued, tackling drugs and crime is included in the mandates of UN peace operations in countries such as Guinea-Bissau and Afghanistan as part of a wider effort to shore up “hard-won progress on peace, development, respect for human rights and the rule of law.”

In his opening statement to the gathering, General Assembly President Sam Kutesa similarly pointed out that no country or society is “immune from the menace of illicit drugs and their attendant effects.”

As an enterprise with annual proceeds estimated at $322 billion, drug trafficking had “infiltrated societies, governments and national and international institutions,” Mr. Kutesa warned, while also adding that only through “collective efforts” focused on prevention and international cooperation could Member States fight back successfully against the spread of drug networks.

“People must be at the centre of all our efforts and we must do what we can to support and empower them to overcome their vulnerabilities, which exposes them to illicit drugs and crime,” said Mr. Kutesa.

“Combating the world drug problem is an urgent and imperative need,” he declared, adding that countries have been fighting back with some success, but the resources directed at this problem could have been more effectively utilised for development.

“Our collective efforts must focus on prevention, while also rendering treatment and care to persons affected by drug addiction and those needing help to alleviate pain and suffering. We must also scale up interventions and international cooperation to resist and combat drug-related international organized crime,” he said.

Against that backdrop, the Deputy Secretary-General cautioned that the human cost of the drug trade continued to remain tragically high.

For instance, the UNODC has also observed that global drug use continues to exact “a significant toll, with valuable human lives and productive years of many persons being lost.” In its Report, the agency notes that an estimated 183,000 drug-related deaths were reported in 2012.

Addressing the gathered delegates, Mr. Eliasson lamented the “human tragedies” encompassed by the global drug problem and called on Member States to escalate efforts in preventing drug use, treating drug dependence, providing health care and social protection as well as supporting alternative livelihoods as “essential aspects of a balanced drug control approach.”

Just last December, the UNODC launched a programme in tandem with the Colombian Government and the Austrian chocolate manufacturer Zotter to help wean Colombian farmers off of revenues from illicit drug crops and replace them with those from cacao cultivations.

The project is part of a wider UN-backed campaign – known as “Montebravo” – which reaches over 120,000 farmer families and was set up to help reduce the economic dependence of farmers on coca leaf production.

“The evidence is clear,” Mr. Eliasson affirmed, “around the world, we see that countries which integrate public health into drug control work achieve greater health effects and social benefits, while at the same time improving rule of law and security.”

“When we meet in April next year, we must be ready to challenge ourselves, try to consolidate our approaches and integrate
a range of perspectives on drug issues.”

**South Sudan: UN confirms new influx of displaced persons seeking refuge at Mission base**

**7 May** - The number of internally displaced persons seeking refuge with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has grown to 53,000 following the latest bout of fighting in the African country, a spokesperson for the Organization has confirmed.

The announcement comes just one day after the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared that the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide had skyrocketed to a record-breaking 38 million by the end of 2014.

Addressing reporters at UN Headquarters during today’s press briefing, UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said UNMISS reported that more than 500 displaced people had arrived at the Mission’s civilian protection site in Bentiu, in Unity state, since 3 May.

The bulk of them, Mr. Dujarric noted, had come from Guit County and the area of Nhialdiu in Rubkona County, where heavy fighting has reportedly been taking place between Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) troops and opposition forces.

He added that this new influx of displaced people brings the total number of civilians protected at the UNMISS site in Bentiu to some 53,000.

South Sudan’s ongoing conflict began in December 2013 and has been marked by brutal violence against civilians and deepening suffering across the country. The major humanitarian consequences are widespread displacement due to the violence, including high rates of death, disease, and injuries, severe food insecurity and disrupted livelihoods, and a major malnutrition crisis.

Some 119,000 people are sheltered in UN compounds across South Sudan while the Organization estimates that the number of people in need for 2015 will include an anticipated 1.95 million IDPs and a projected 293,000 refugees.

According to Mr. Dujarric, UNMISS confirmed it was aware of reports claiming that SPLA forces had gained control of territory in Nhialdiu and Guit County that has been under the control of armed opposition forces for some time but acknowledged that the Mission remained unable to independently verify these reports.

At the same time, UNMISS had said that its patrols in Bentiu continue to face movement restrictions, which are impeding monitoring and protection activities outside the protections site.

**UN predicts world food import bill to fall to five-year low, amid hefty commodity supply**

**7 May** - A report on agricultural commodity prices released today by the United Nations agricultural agency says that hefty supply levels mean rates will continue to decline despite pressure from a slight reduction in global harvests.

“The world food import bill is forecast to reach a five-year low in 2015,” says *Food Outlook*, a biannual publication by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) focusing on developments affecting global food and feed markets. “Currency movements and macroeconomic developments may have important implications for markets again in 2015-16.”
The Food Price Index, a trade-weighted database that tracks and aggregates on a monthly basis the prices of cereals, meat, dairy products, vegetable oils and sugar on international markets, reflected that decline, with a 1.2 per cent overall drop in April from March. The index reached 171 points, its lowest level since June 2010 and 19.2 per cent less than a year ago.

*Food Outlook* says international food prices are likely to stay under downward pressure due to large supplies, low freight rates and a strong US dollar, with import volumes of the five commodities little changed or even rising. The reduction in import bills is likely to benefit low income countries.

Despite a slight reduction in global harvests expected this year – with a 1.5 per cent decline in cereal production from last year’s record output – “exceptionally high” levels of existing stocks will offset the pressure, according to the FAO’s report. The reduction in cereal production remains nearly five per cent above the average of the past five years.

Dairy prices fell the most, buoying imports in Africa, while the abolition of the European Union’s (EU) milk quota system was also one of the main drivers of the 6.7 percent monthly drop. Sugar, cereals and vegetable oils prices also declined. By contrast, meat values rose in April, which was their first increase since August 2014.

*Food Outlook* also includes a special feature focusing on price volatility, highlighting a need to investigate whether volatility has returned to normal or not.

**Nepal: UN agency calls for ramped-up efforts to boost health services in quake-hit country**

7 May - Amid continuing relief efforts throughout Nepal, the threat of disease increasingly hangs over the earthquake-stricken nation as the country’s water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure struggles to recover from the 7.8 magnitude tremor, an official with the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) has warned.

“We are very concerned about the increased risk of communicable diseases, including diarrhoea, in areas where hygiene and sanitation systems are disrupted,” Dr. Poonam Khetrapal Singh, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia, said today during a visit to Nepal's capital, Kathmandu.

“We have a four-week window to preposition medical supplies in affected districts and strengthen the country's water, sanitation and hygiene systems so as to shield it against the threat of disease outbreaks,” Dr. Singh continued. “These include water-borne and vector-borne diseases such as dengue and malaria, along with acute respiratory infections.”

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.

In addition, ten hospitals were completely or partly damaged, along with more than 600 smaller facilities, predominantly village health posts, which supply basic medicines and other routine services in remote communities outside the Kathmandu Valley, according to the WHO.

The UN health agency has allotted over $1.1 million as an emergency response to the brimming health crisis facing Nepal and made available 20 emergency response staff and medicines and other health supplies for tens of thousands of people. More than 50,000 patients have been treated in hospitals in the 14 districts most affected by the earthquake as of 5 May.

At the same time, Dr. Singh stressed that more must be done to protect the health of Nepal’s people including ramping up the country’s disease and response system, providing large quantities of necessary medical supplies, and supporting the recovery of the health system.

“WHO will continue working with UN partners, governments and non-governmental organizations to ensure the health of
the affected people living in these harsh conditions is protected,” Dr. Singh added.

“WHO stands with the Government of Nepal as it strives to overcome this crisis.”

**UNESCO chief condemns murder of journalists in separate incidents in East Africa**

7 May - The head of the United Nations agency mandated to promote freedom of expression and the safety of media workers worldwide has today condemned the murder of two journalists, a Somalian and a Kenyan, and urged an investigation into the two separate incidents.

Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), voiced deep concern for the safety of journalists following the murder of Somalian journalist Daud Ali Omar and his wife, Hawo Abdi Aden, in the city of Baidoa on 29 April.

“I condemn the murder of Daud Ali Omar and of his wife,” Ms. Bokova said.

“Somali journalists have been paying an unacceptably high price for trying to keep the people of Somalia informed.”

“It is essential that the authorities do all in their power to improve the safety of journalists. This means that they cannot allow such horrific crimes to go unpunished,” she stressed.

Mr. Daud, 35, was a producer for the local, privately owned station Radio Baidoa.

Ms. Bokova also urged an investigation into the 30 April killing of Kenyan newspaper publisher John Kituyi, calling on Kenyan authorities to shed light into his murder.

“I condemn the murder of John Kituyi,” the Director-General said. “It is important that the Kenyan authorities conduct a thorough investigation into this crime. The freedom to produce, disseminate and receive news and information from free, diverse and independent media hinges on States’ commitment to ensure that media workers can carry out their professional duties without fear of violence and reprisal. This crime should not go unpunished.”

Mr. Kituyi was the owner and editor of the Mirror Weekly, a regional newspaper he founded in the town of Eldoret in the west of Kenya ten years ago.

The UNESCO’s Director-General issues statements on the killing of media workers in line with Resolution 29 adopted by UNESCO Member States at the Organization’s General Conference of 1997, entitled “Condemnation of Violence against Journalists.”

These statements are posted on a webpage condemning the killing of journalists.