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'Ve need to find a way to live together,’ says UN chief in special plea for tolerance

8 January - Making an impassioned appeal for tolerance, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called for understanding among all communities to heal the tensions within societies – a particularly poignant plea following yesterday’s horrific attack on the staff at French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, and in the face of ongoing sectarian violence across Africa’s Sahel region being fuelled by Boko Haram.

“In far too many places, we have seen acts of extremism, unspeakable brutality and a deeply worrying escalation of tensions between communities and within societies. Addressing this discord in a manner that solves, rather than multiplies, the problem may be the greatest test our human family faces in the 21st century,” Mr. Ban told reporters at UN Headquarters.

The Secretary-General’s appeal came after his informal briefing to the 193-Member UN General Assembly, where he launched the Organization-wide campaign for broad based action in 2015 to wrap up the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and outline a new global agenda centred on people and the planet, and underpinned by human rights.

“All of us were deeply moved by the many images from yesterday’s despicable attack in Paris. Perhaps none was as horrifying as that of a French policeman ruthlessly executed on a sidewalk,” said the Secretary-General, adding: “We now know that policeman’s name. He was Ahmed Merabet. He himself was a Muslim.”

The attack, continued Mr. Ban, in which 10 media workers and two police officers were killed by masked gunmen who ransacked the offices of Charlie Hebdo, “is yet another reminder of what we are facing together.”
“It should never be seen as a war of religion … for religion … or on religion. It is an assault on our common humanity, designed to terrify and incite. Giving in to hatred and sowing division only guarantees a spiral of violence – precisely what terrorists seek. We must not fall into that trap,” he declared.

“I want to make a special appeal for tolerance and understanding,” he said, stressing: “We need to find a way to live together, in peace, in harmony, in full respect of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

As Nigeria readsies for its election next month, the Secretary-General said the world faces another grave test. Boko Haram has continued its violence, killing Christians and Muslims, kidnapping even more women and children, and destroying churches and mosques. Mayhem has spread across the region, and is now having a direct impact on Cameroon and other countries.

“I urge Boko Haram’s leaders to end the destruction of so many lives and communities, and immediately and unconditionally release the kidnapped school girls and all others. The international community cannot let human rights abuses continue with impunity,” he declared.

“This is my personal appeal. As a father and grandfather and as Secretary-General, I will continue to actively explore with Member States what more can be done,” he concluded.

**Ebola: vaccine trials can offer “signs of hope” says UN health chief**

**8 January** - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) today convened its second ever high-level meeting on Ebola vaccines access and financing, in Geneva, Switzerland, to review the current status of clinical trials and plans for Phase II and Phase III efficacy trials.

“We are here to take stock, plan the next steps, and make sure that all partners are working in tandem. We all want the momentum and sense of urgency to continue,” Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of WHO said as she kicked off the meeting.

The most advanced candidate Ebola vaccines is scheduled to enter Phase III efficacy clinical trials in West Africa in January/February 2015, and if shown effective – will be available for deployment a few months later.

“You have given yourselves some very tight deadlines and are moving ahead quickly. In fact, what you are doing is unprecedented: compressing into a matter of months work that normally takes 2 to 4 years, yet with no compromise of international standards of safety and efficacy,” Dr. Chan said.

“I think all of us have high expectations for the outcome of this meeting. As a WHO staff member who has spent several months in Guinea recently observed, what people need most is hope. They have watched families and communities torn apart by this virus for a year and are close to despair” she said, adding: “You can give them some of that hope.”

Participating in today’s discussions were representatives from manufacturers and research institutions, currently developing or testing Ebola candidate vaccines, Government officials from the Ebola-affected and neighbouring countries, and non-governmental organizations and partners.

Also on the agenda are discussions on funding mechanisms for potential Ebola vaccine introduction and the process for decision-making on introduction beyond Phase III trials. The First high-level meeting on Ebola vaccines access and financing was held on 23 October 2014.

“During this meeting, you will take a look at safety and immunogenicity data emerging from Phase 1 clinical trials of two candidate vaccines and review the status of other vaccines,” Dr. Chan said, adding that no major safety signals have been reported to date.
Participants will also look at vaccine pipelines and consider the plans of companies to extend the safety database during Phase II evaluation. Equally important are discussions for Phase III efficacy trials in the three countries, she said.

“We will seek clarity on roles and responsibilities and how to coordinate the different actions. We also need some hard thinking about implementation challenges and how to overcome them.”

Updating participants on the Ebola situation in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, Dr. Chan said that 2014 did not end with a best-case scenario. Many health care workers are still getting infected, including nationals and doctors and nurses from foreign medical teams.

At the same time, the situation in Liberia looks “far more promising” than it did in October and November. But transmission continues. Some believe that the virus has moved from the cities into extremely remote rural areas, making it difficult to see what is really happening in Liberia.

In yet another turn of events, Sierra Leone has now outstripped Liberia as the worst-affected country. Several hundred cases are being reported each week.

‘2015 can and must be time for global action,’ Ban declares, briefing UN Assembly on year’s priorities

8 January - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon looked forward to a “year of opportunity,” as he briefed the 193-Member United Nations General Assembly on his priorities for 2015, and called for transformative global action that would ensure sustainable development and human dignity for all.

“2015 is a chance for major advances across the three inter-connected pillars of our work: development, peace and human rights,” he said during an informal meeting of the Assembly, praising Member States’ work to build a new development agenda, including a set of sustainable development goals.

“In my synthesis report, now delivered to you – The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet – I am offering my support of this work and some further ideas on the road ahead.”

The report aims to support States’ discussions going forward, taking stock of the negotiations on the post-2015 agenda and reviewing lessons from pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It stresses the need to “finish the job” of the Goals – both to help people now and as a launch pad for the new agenda.

Adding that the report proposes a set of “essential elements” to help ensure that States’ vision is communicated accurately to the general public – and achieved nationally – he said adoption of the new agenda would be the “signal moment” of 2015.

Briefing the press on the report earlier in the day, the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, Amina Mohammed, said the emerging sustainability agenda is “bold and transformative” and the report highlighted six essential elements that will help drive country-level implementation: dignity, people, prosperity, planet, justice and partnership.

“[These elements] are meant to inspire Member States and all stakeholders in their efforts to agree on a transformative and communicable sustainable development agenda,” she said, explaining that the strength of the six elements lies in their interdependence with each other and must be considered as a whole.

Mr. Ban stressed that the results of the new development programme would be inseparable from climate action, reminding States of their pledges at the recently-concluded 20th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 20) to the landmark UN Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in Lima, Peru, to present national commitments in the first quarter of 2015.
A slate of upcoming UN conferences this year – on disaster risk reduction in March, on financing for development in July, and on climate change in December, as well as a summit-level meeting in New York this coming September – would seek to tackle the linked challenges of sustainable development.

“At each of these milestones, we will continue to be ambitious to end poverty, reducing inequality and exploit the opportunities that accompanied the climate challenge,” he said.

He made a specific reference to the impact on development of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, which was a major setback for the hardest hit countries. Affected nations were beginning to see improvements but people and resources were still needed. At the same time, preparations were needed for the next epidemic, “wherever it may occur.”

The Secretary-General also spotlighted the impacts of war in Syria, Ukraine, Central African Republic, northern Mali and elsewhere, pointing out that several other countries were at risk of conflict because of their domestic situations.

“In several countries, electoral processes and constitutional amendments seem designed to prolong incumbencies instead of strengthening democracy,” he said, calling for negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians and urging responses to “brutality and extremism” that were not limited only to military action but which included efforts to address the underlying conditions giving rise to extremism.

Welcoming the entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty, he said peace and security is not achievable in a world where nuclear weapons were available. He urged States to fulfil their responsibilities under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

“The nuclear powers continue to waste huge sums to upgrade their arsenals rather than eliminate [them],” he said. “The Treaty Review Conference, which will begin in April, will be an opportunity to renew our commitment not only to non-proliferation but also disarmament.”

On the third pillar of UN work – human rights and the rule of law – he pointed to the “deliberate and diabolical slaughter” of schoolchildren in Pakistan and to the frequent targeting of hospitals, schools and other civilian facilities.

“Both Governments and non-State actors are exhibiting a callous disregard for the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian and human rights law,” he said, calling for strengthened protection and greater accountability.

Despite having endorsed the principle of “responsibility to protect” – or “R2P” – 10 years ago, the international community still failed to act on early warning signs in too many crises. He urged reclamation of the people-centred focus that made endorsement of the principle possible in the first place and said his next report would explore how better to operationalize ‘R2P.’

As well as hoping to see moves towards abolition of the death penalty, he hoped for efforts to counter intolerance faced by migrants, refugees, minorities and other marginalized groups and noted that 2015 is the beginning of the International Decade for People of African Descent.

“Over the years, the world has failed to fully recognize the legacy of colonialism and the slave trade, and the discrimination still faced by people of African descent,” he said. “An important part of this observance will be the unveiling here at UN Headquarters of the Permanent Memorial to [honour the Victims of Slavery and] the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.”

To tackle the inter-connected pillars in the coming year, the UN has to be better fit for purpose, and he outlined areas where reviews and improvements are taking place, including peace operations and peacebuilding, financing for humanitarian operations, modernizing the Secretariat and dealing with emerging challenges like cybersecurity.

As the United Nations enters the year marking its 70th anniversary, it is faced with huge responsibilities but also opportunity.

“If our work unfolds as it should, by the end of this year, our Organization will be enriched with a new vision for
development, new ideas for the maintenance of peace and security, a renewed embrace of human rights, and a stronger United Nations to help bring it all to life,” he said.

**Security Council calls on DR Congo leader to approve joint action to ‘neutralize’ rebels**

8 January - The Security Council today called on the authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to “swiftly approve” plans to begin joint operations between the Congolese military and the United Nations peacekeeping force to “neutralize” a rebel group with a long history of heinous crimes in the eastern regions of the vast country.

With the deadline for the unconditional surrender of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) having passed on 2 January, and no significant additional surrenders of FDLR combatants registered since June, the Council today called, in a presidential statement, on DRC President Joseph Kabila to swiftly approve and implement a joint Congolese and UN plan “to neutralize the FDLR by commencing military operations immediately.”

The Congolese military (FARDC) and the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC, known by the French acronym MONUSCO, have been preparing for joint action since the rebel group missed the deadline set by the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The Council’s statement follows a 7 January telephone conversation between President Kabila and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in which the UN chief called for decisive action against the armed group and welcomed Mr. Kabila’s assurance that the DRC was ready to take action, with the available assistance of MONUSCO.

For its part, the Security Council reiterated the need to “put into sustained action the plans of the FARDC and MONUSCO through its Force Intervention Brigade…to neutralize the FDLR by commencing military operations immediately.”

Reiterating support for MONUSCO, the Council called on all parties, including troop-contributing countries, “to remain committed to the full and objective implementation of the mission’s mandate, including military operations to neutralize the FDLR.”

Also, the 15-member Council stressed that ending the threat of the FDLR, “including through robust military action” by the FARDC and MONUSCO, “is a critical and necessary component of civilian protection, and expresses its intention to take into account progress made in ending the threat of the FDLR in assessing next steps in the Great Lakes.”

**‘Gaps left by our fallen staff members can never be filled’ – UN chief**

8 January - At a solemn event at Headquarters this morning, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon honoured colleagues killed on duty, as he explained that while demand for humanitarian workers is growing at an unprecedented rate, direct attacks against those vital actors are on the rise.

Between October 2013 and November 2014, 100 UN staff members were killed while on duty.

“Let us pause together for a minute of silence in their memory,” Mr. Ban said, adding that the fallen colleagues had paid “the ultimate sacrifice” while serving the cause of peace, development and human rights.

“In the past year, UN staff members have been killed while they were relaxing over dinner in a restaurant in Kabul. Two
colleagues were targeted deliberately after getting off a plane at Galkayo airport in Somalia. And a UN Volunteer from Sudan who was treating Ebola patients in Sierra Leone succumbed to the disease himself,” the Secretary-General explained.

“Some were targeted deliberately; others were killed while protecting civilians; still others perished in accidents or natural disasters. All died while performing their duties in difficult and dangerous circumstances.”

Also at today’s ceremony, the UN paid tribute to the 102 colleagues who died in the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti five years ago this month.

“The terrible memories of that day are still fresh in all our minds, and in the minds of Haiti’s people. The gaps left by our fallen staff members can never be filled. I visited last July and laid a wreath in memory of our beloved friends and colleagues,” the UN chief said.

In recent years, direct attacks against UN personal have become more frequent.

“I am appalled by the number of humanitarian workers and peacekeepers who have been deliberately targeted in the past year, while there were trying to help people in crisis,” Mr. Ban said.

Still, UN workers are persevering, Mr Ban said. In Iraq and Syria, UN personnel conduct life-saving humanitarian operations. In Central African Republic, South Sudan, Mali and Ukraine, they stand ready to response to political and human rights crises.

“I have seen many of these missions for myself. The bravery shown by United Nations staff under fire is an inspiration to all of us, every day,” Mr. Ban said.

Vowing commitment to their safety, Mr. Ban stressed the importance of better equipment and in-depth training. Member States must support these efforts, provide funding, and ensure that all attackers against UN staff are brought to justice.

While attacks have been more frequent, demand for peacekeeping and humanitarian operations has risen to unprecedented levels and is likely to continue increased, due to the effects of climate change and the completion of resources, the Secretary-General said.

“The best memorial we can offer our fallen colleagues is to continue their work, to expand our operations, to extend our open hand, wherever help is needed.”

Senior UN official warns Security Council of ‘fragile political situation’ in West African countries

8 January - West Africa’s political landscape remains delicate as nations across the region continue to grapple with insecurity, terrorist threats and tensions ahead of a busy election cycle, the United Nations senior official there told the Security Council this afternoon.

“Recent developments demonstrate the fragile political situation in many West African nations in the lead-up to presidential and legislative elections in 2015-2016,” said Mohamed ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA), as he briefed the Council on his Office’s activities in the second half of 2014.

Mr. Chambas, giving his first briefing as UNOWA chief, referred to political instability in The Gambia and Burkina Faso. In The Gambia, a third coup attempt in eight years was defeated by forces loyal to incumbent President Yahya Jammeh, who has held office for 20 years.

In Burkina Faso meanwhile, a joint mission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African
Union and United Nations helped secure an agreement among national stakeholders for a civilian-led transition when an uprising in October 2014 led to the abrupt resignation of President Blaise Compaoré, after he sought to amend the Constitution to run for a third term.

Presidential elections were also scheduled for next year in Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria and Togo. The end of 2014 was marked by demonstrations in Togo over the Government’s failure to introduce presidential term limits and reform the single-round voting system, while Benin’s Government needed to ensure an end to delays in introducing electronic voter registration lists.

General elections due to take place in Nigeria in a month would do so in the midst of Boko Haram’s violent insurgency and sectarian conflicts in several regions.

“The holding of polls throughout the states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa will present a formidable challenge,” said Mr. Chambas. “The risk of pre-and post-electoral violence requires the international community to engage further with Nigeria, to address its ongoing challenges and to support the holding of credible and peaceful elections throughout the country.”

He said counter-insurgency measures efforts were yet to provide adequate protection for civilians from the threat posed by Boko Haram, with the civilian population in the three north-eastern states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe subjected to intense attacks and systematic human rights violations over the last six months.

“The death toll of this vicious violence, most of which has been attributed to Boko Haram, is staggering,” he said, pointing out that the UN’s Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force was holding a series of workshops for law enforcement officials on human rights, the rule of law and the prevention of terrorism.

More than 300,000 Nigerians have fled to north-western Cameroon and south-western Niger, and he said UNOWA is working with members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – to address regional aspects of the crisis.

Violent piracy persisted in the Gulf of Guinea, hindering trade, and requiring greater effort to resolve maritime border disputes, while the Ebola outbreak had plunged the region into an unparalleled public health crisis. In mid-November, Mr. Chambas and the President of ECOWAS visited the three most-affected countries – Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

“We must ensure that the aftermath of the outbreak does not reverse the gains made during years of peacebuilding activities,” he said.

**Darfur: UN receives reports of significant civilian displacement**

8 January - The United Nations Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) today said that it has received reports of significant civilian displacement in Sudan’s North Darfur and South Darfur states.

The displacement may be due to an escalation of operations by Government forces against armed opposition groups in and around Jebel Marra.

The Office had also received “unverified” reports of direct attacks on civilian villages in that area, UN spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told reporters at Headquarters this afternoon.

“An inter-agency mission to Tawila in North Darfur is planned later this week to verify displacement figures and assess needs,” he added.

Requests for access to affected areas in Central Darfur have so far been denied due to the protracted violence.

In the meantime, the UN reiterates its call on all parties to the conflict in Darfur to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, and to ensure safe and unhindered access for humanitarian organizations.
UN, educators applaud Paramount’s ‘Selma,’ chronicling Martin Luther King’s campaign for voting equality

8 January - Top United Nations officials yesterday attended a special screening in New York of the movie Selma, about the historic struggle of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s marches from Selma to Montgomery Alabama that led to United States President Lyndon Johnson signing the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The film screening was attended by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon along with his wife, Madame Ban Soon-taek, Deputy Secretary General Jan Eliasson, as well as the film’s director, Ava DuVernay.

Teachers, educators and students also attended the event as part of a programme that encourages public schools to teach the history of African-Americans and the African Diaspora. The event was co-organized by Paramount Pictures and the New Jersey Amistad Commission and the UN Department of Public Information (DPI), as part of its Remember Slavery programme.

Selma chronicles a string of historical events that led to the trailblazing marches, including the relationship between Dr. King and President Johnson and the struggle of ordinary citizens.

The film tells the story of the American south in the early 1960s, where black citizens applying to vote were repeatedly blocked by local registrars. By 1965, there were countries in Alabama, one of the worst cases in the south, where not a single black person had voted in any election for previous 50 years – although African Americans were guaranteed the right to vote in 1870.

These events came to a head on 7 March, 1965, when marchers, led by civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., were assaulted by local and state troopers.

Describing her process in directing the film, Ms. DuVernay said her goal was to humanize Dr. King so the audience could connect with him.

“I think if you see [Dr.] King as a man and not a myth, not a ‘mountaintop’ speech and not all of the things that we have constructed about him, and when you see him as man it allows his greatness to be closer to us and allows us to touch that greatness and be that great.”

New Jersey 7th grader, Celeste Hopkin, told UN Radio that watching Selma inspired her.

“I think [the film] was very interesting especially because in school we don’t really learn a lot about Dr. Martin Luther King...It revealed a lot of things I didn’t even know about the march. I think it was very important because it showed all of the hardships they went through and what we have overcome in the past 50 years,” she said.

“Dr. Martin Luther King had hope and that pushed him…and now in Ferguson they need that hope and that guidance to overcome what has happened and not to have it revealed in violence but in a different way,” Celeste added, referring to the city in the US state of Missouri, where in August 2014, unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown was shot by a white police officer.

The Selma screening was part of the UN Remember Slavery programme, which mobilizes educators to teach about the causes and consequences of the transatlantic slave trade and to communicate the dangers of racism and prejudice.
“Selma reminds us of the issues and challenges that people of African descent have faced in the recent past and continue to face long after slavery has officially ended,” said Maher Nasser, the Acting head of DPI.

The UN General Assembly has proclaimed 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent citing the need to strengthen cooperation in relation to the full enjoyment of all rights by people of African descent, and their full participation in all aspects of society.

“Films can serve as powerful educational tools to teach the young generations about the dangers of racism and prejudice,” added Mr. Nasser.

**UN and partners stress need for end to political impasse in Haiti before week’s end**

8 January - Less than a week before the Parliament in Haiti becomes dysfunctional, the United Nations and its international partners noted with deep concern that no solution to the political crisis has yet been found.

The Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Haiti, Sandra Honoré, and other members of the international community represented in the “Core Group” – comprising the Ambassadors of Brazil, Canada, France, Spain, United States, and the European Union, as well as the Special Representative of the Organization of American States – stressed the need for an urgent end to the political and electoral impasse in line with the recommendations of the Presidential Advisory Commission.

“In order to strengthen stability, preserve the democratic gains and ensure sustainable development in Haiti, members of the Core Group urge all the political actors to come together, to find a solution before the end of this week,” said a news release issued on Wednesday.

In the statement, the Group reiterated its support for the inter-Haitian process that was essential to the formation of a consensus government and a Provisional Electoral Council to create the conditions necessary for the conduct of free, fair, inclusive and transparent elections in 2015.

**Food prices fall after three months stable, index declines for third successive year – UN**

8 January - After three months of stability, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization’s (FAO) Food Price Index declined in December, meaning the index fell over the course of 2014 for the third consecutive year.

The 1.7 per cent fall in December, which comes after the index had appeared to bottom out last month, was credited to continued large supplies and record stocks, combined with a strong US dollar and falling oil prices, according to a press release on the monthly survey.

The trade-weighted index, which tracks prices of cereals, meat, dairy products, vegetable oils, and sugar on international markets, averaged 202 points over 2014, down 3.7 percent from 2013. It saw year-on-year declines in the prices of four of the products, with the numbers approaching their lowest level in five years. Only meat has risen, and it reached an all-time high annual average of 199 points, up 8.1 percent from 2013.

While posting strong annual figures, meat prices declined in December by 1.9 per cent from the previous month, as a stronger US dollar affected prices for beef and mutton from Oceania and pork from Europe. The December decline was not enough to stop the annual growth, and prices remain close to their all-time high, having risen 8.1 percent in 2014.
The sugar price index dropped by 4.8 per cent to 219 points in December, mainly due to abundant supplies in major producing countries coupled with falling crude oil prices, which reduce demand for sugar crops to be converted into ethanol.

“Ample supplies aside, the drop in oil prices obviously makes ethanol production less attractive,” said FAO senior economist Abdolreza Abbassian.

Lower crude oil prices had negative effects on commodities that can be used for biofuels, notably sugar but also palm oil. Depressed demand for palm oil as a biodiesel feedstock also contributed to vegetable oil prices hitting a five-year low of 161 points in December.

Cereals saw price drops of 12.5 per cent over the course of 2014, on the back of forecasts of record production and ample inventories. Wheat prices rose on the back of worries that Russia may restrict exports, though the strong dollar helped to cap the rise, while abundant export supplies pushed rice prices down markedly.

The decline in the dairy price index to its lowest level since 2009 was attributed to a slowing of dairy imports by China and Russia, which left ample export supplies for international markets. The greatest declines were seen in milk powders, butter and cheese.

“Dairy prices at the start of 2014 were at record levels,” said Mr. Abbassian. “From those levels to what we ended the year with in December prices fell 34 per cent. This was probably the biggest single decline among all the commodities.”

UN mourns slain French cartoonists

8 January - The United Nations agency tasked with defending freedom of expression, in solidarity with France, joins the mourning declared following the deadly attack on Charlie Hebdo magazine.

Ten media workers and two police officers were gunned down yesterday in Paris when at least two gunmen ransacked the offices of French weekly Charlie Hebdo.

Like the French authorities, staff at the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), headquartered in Paris, observed a minute of silence at noon today.

“UNESCO is more determined than ever to protect the free and independent press,” Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, said in a statement yesterday condemning the attack.

“The international community cannot let extremists sow terror and prevent the free flow of opinions and ideas,” she stressed.

Yesterday, UNESCO announced that it had lowered the flag to half-mast in respect for those killed and injured.

Calling the assault a “cold-blooded crime”, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said it was a direct “attack against freedom of expression and freedom of the press - the two pillars of democracy.”

Among the dead are four of France’s most renowned cartoonists: Georges Wolinski, Jean Cabut (Cabu), Bernard Verlhac (Tignous) and Stephane Charbonnier (Charb).