Refugees have to be dealt with as human beings, stresses senior UN official

8 September - Refugees have to be dealt with as human beings, and the broader migrant community, including economic migrants, cannot be dismissed “with a wave of the hand,” the top United Nations official dealing with migration said today.

“I’d like to start by making a fundamental point which I think has been overlooked in quite a lot of this crisis,” Peter Sutherland, the Special Representative for International Migration, told a press conference in Geneva.

“The obligation and responsibility to refugees and persons in distress is not defined by their proximity to the place that caused the problem,” he explained. “I think it’s important to make that point, because the burden that is being taken at the moment by Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, and the burden in European terms being taken by the frontline States of the Mediterranean, in particular Greece and Italy, seems to by implication define a responsibility related to location rather than to the humanitarian concerns that we have.”

On the same issue, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has underlined the need for compassion and global solidarity in dealing with the arrival of refugees and migrants in Europe, in his calls with the leaders of Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia.

“Recognising the challenges this poses to some Member States, the Secretary-General stressed the individual and collective responsibility of European states to respond responsibly and humanely,” his spokesperson said in a statement. “He stressed
that the large majority of people arriving in Europe are refugees fleeing war and violence, who have a right to seek asylum without any form of discrimination.”

Commending the efforts of many European leaders, Mr. Ban encouraged the European Union countries to live up to their obligations and the standards they have set. “He underlined the need for compassion and global solidarity, and applauded the inspiring examples that have been displayed all over Europe by private citizens and civil society.”

The Secretary-General also appealed to these leaders to be “the voice of those in need of protection” and to quickly find a joint approach to address their basic needs. “As European leaders, their stand against increasing xenophobia, discrimination, and violence against migrants and refugees in Europe is particularly important. He hoped that any manifestation of these phenomena would be addressed firmly and without delay,” the statement added.

In his press conference, Mr. Sutherland described the current situation faced by refugees and migrants fleeing conflict zones as an “appalling catastrophic situation” by which the UN is challenged.

“In earlier crisis, for example of Viet Nam and the Vietnamese boat people, where over a million people were concerned, or indeed in 1956 the Hungarian Revolution, there was a global acceptance of a responsibility in terms of refugees,” he recalled.

He noted that at the time of the crisis in Viet Nam, an international conference was convened, and responsibilities were taken across the globe.

“So in a situation where some countries take no refugees, including for example a number of the Arab countries in the immediate vicinity, or where others argue that financial contributions are the mechanism to be used for their contribution to a dreadful situation, let me say that that, in my opinion, is not enough,” Mr. Sutherland warned.

“The United Nations stands for the dignity of the individual and the quality of the individual,” he continued. “It cannot condone or accept those in government who say, for example, that refugees can be defined by their religion in the responsibility that is owed to them. That is utterly unacceptable.”

The Special Representative underlined that it is not acceptable that within the regions, the burden is not shared in a fair and transparent way.

“If we have a situation where one, two, three, four, or indeed currently five countries take 72 per cent of the total refugee community, and others take much less, some virtually none, the inevitable consequence over time will be that the political pressure placed on those who are most generous will become more and more difficult because of the unfairness of what is happening,” he noted.

The official added that the UN has to drive a much more proactive response by the international community.

“I’ve seen also the outpouring of a human response which has been an example to the political response, which has been absent,” he said.

“How is it that the dreadful, tragic photograph of one appalling incident transforms public policy? We have been talking for months, for years, about the deaths of people in the Mediterranean. Maybe there wasn’t a sufficient photograph to elicit change? But isn’t that a poor reflection on decision making?”

Mr. Sutherland also told reporters that many UN agencies are struggling to deliver humanitarian relief, including the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which he said cannot maintain its support.

Meanwhile, in a press release published today, UNICEF announced that a rising number of women and children are passing through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia to seek refuge in Europe.

Nearly 10,000 people, approximately 40 per cent of whom were women and children, were registered crossing into the
former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia at Gevgelija from Greece between 1 and 6 September. More than 7,720 people were also registered crossing into Serbia through Presevo over the same time period.

The agency also informed that with its partners, it is continuing to expand humanitarian services at reception centres in the two countries.

**Close to 8,000 people killed in eastern Ukraine, says UN human rights report**

*8 September* - Close to 8,000 people have lost their lives in eastern Ukraine since mid-April 2014, according to the latest report by the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in the country which was released today.

The report, which covers the period from 16 May to 15 August 2015, notes that the number of civilian casualties more than doubled by comparison with the previous three months, with at least 105 people killed and 308 injured compared to 60 killed and 102 injured between 16 February and 15 May.

“The shelling of residential areas on both sides of the contact line has led to a disturbing increase in the number of civilian casualties over the past three months,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein warned in a press release.

“More needs to be done to protect civilians and put a complete stop to the hostilities, in accordance with the February ceasefire agreement,” he added.

Since the conflict began in eastern Ukraine in mid-April 2014, a total of at least 7,962 people – including Ukrainian armed forces, civilians and members of the armed groups – have been killed, and at least 17,811 injured, the High Commissioner said, citing the latest figures available.

“The withdrawal of heavy weapons from the contact line as foreseen in the Minsk Agreements remained partial with the armed groups and the Ukrainian military using mortars, canons, howitzers, tanks and multiple launch rocket systems in daily clashes and exchanges of fire along the contact line,” the report states, noting that during the reporting period, the majority of civilian casualties caused by shelling occurred within the territories controlled by the armed groups.

The document further underlines that “the situation in Ukraine continued to be marred by ongoing armed hostilities in some areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions reportedly fuelled by the presence and continuing influx of foreign fighters and sophisticated weapons and ammunition from the Russian Federation.”

It also flags “concern that the Russian Federation has continued to send white-truck convoys without the full consent or inspection of Ukraine, and their exact destination and content could not be verified.”

Meanwhile, the development of more centralized civilian administrative structures and procedures in the self-proclaimed ‘Donetsk people’s republic’ and ‘Luhansk people’s republic’ continued during the reporting period, although they do not conform with either international law or the national legislation of Ukraine.

According to the report, civilians living in the conflict-affected area, particularly near the contact line, bear the brunt of the armed conflict, facing uncertainty and hardship on a daily basis. Their overall situation is reportedly worsening, including in terms of access to food and water, and is of particular concern with winter approaching.

The access and provision of humanitarian and medical aid to those living in the conflict area is being impeded by the security situation and by the Government’s prohibition on the transport of cargo, including food and medicine.

The UN report also states that despite the creation of a web portal for applying and receiving permits online, the ‘Temporary Order’ issued by the Ukrainian Government continues to severely restrict the freedom of movement. Due to long queues at
check points, people are said to be forced to stay in areas where they are at risk of shelling for extended periods, or to seek alternative routes which may not be clear of mines and unexploded ordinance.

Cases of killings, abductions, torture and ill-treatment, sexual violence, forced labour, ransom demands and extortion in the territories controlled by the self-proclaimed ‘Donetsk people’s republic’ and ‘Luhansk people’s republic’ are also documented.

The report notes a “persistent pattern of arbitrary and incommunicado detention by the Ukrainian law enforcement, mainly by the Security Service of Ukraine, and by military and paramilitary units.”

Furthermore, the report warns that human rights violations continue to be committed by the de facto authorities in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

“I am particularly concerned at the recent sentencing to 20 years of prison of Ukrainian film-maker Oleh Sentsov by a Russian Federation Military Court,” High Commissioner Zeid said. “His trial was marred by irregularities.”

He noted that the court refused to look into credible allegations of torture and ill-treatment during his pre-trial detention and that the verdict was passed despite the main prosecution witness recanting his testimony in the courtroom, insisting that it had been extorted under torture.

A Crimean activist, Oleksandr Kolchenko, was also sentenced to 10 years for his alleged participation in the terrorist plot.

**UN envoy says it is now time to have ‘a real discussion’ to end Syrian conflict**

8 September - The United Nations Special Envoy on Syria today said the images of the drowned Syrian toddler wearing a red shirt and blue shorts lying face down on a Turkish beach should be a wake-up call to the world that “there is no more time for long political processes,” and it is now time to have “a real discussion” to end the conflict.

“I think Aylan has been telling us this – there is no time anymore for long-term conferences and discussions. Now is the time to really look in the eyes of those who are telling us “we have no more hope, we have no more patience,” said Staffan de Mistura, referring to the three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, whose body washed up on shore last week.

“There is no more time for long political processes, there is a need to create concrete hope for the people in Syria,” Mr. de Mistura told reporters in Brussels, Belgium, where he held discussions with senior European Union officials.

The UN envoy stressed that now is the time to have “a real discussion.”

“If Saudi Arabia and Iran would finally start talking to each other and talking about something that could be a Helsinki type of arrangement... the conflict will last one more month – not one year, not 10 years,” he said, “because oxygen will disappear from the conflict.”

Mr. de Mistura pointed out that Saudi Arabia and Iran have “substantial influence” in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Syria, and that talks between the two could contribute to ending the conflict provided the two countries “were not alone at the table.”

“I’ve been 43 years with the UN, 19 conflicts, people start talking when there is lack of sponsorship for the actual conflict,” the envoy said. “Oxygen taken away from the fire, the fire goes off.”

He welcomed discussions on Syria between the United States and Russia, “which is a good sign, but they have not yet come up with a concrete outcome on the main issue of what is going to be the future of the governance of Syria.”
Europe, he said, was not involved in the conflict but could contribute by establishing a common understanding on how to receive refugees with dignity and by trying to fill the gap of funding, not least since only 31 per cent of the funds promised to the UN agencies for the more than 4 million refugees in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon had been delivered.

Meanwhile, the UN refugee agency warned that “as the crisis digs deeper into its fifth year with no sign of a political solution in sight, despair is on the rise and hope is in short supply.”

The last few months have been brutal, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Fighting has intensified in almost all governorates, with rocket and mortar attacks on Damascus increasing, rising vehicle explosions in major cities and heavy bombardments with ensuing retaliation driving thousands more people from their homes.

Amid the escalating violence, the agency said unemployment is soaring alongside inflation, while the value of the currency plummets – the Syrian pound has lost 90 per cent of its value over the last four years. In most parts of Syria, electricity is available only 2-4 hours a day, if at all, and many regions struggle with water shortages. More than half the population lives in extreme poverty.

For the refugees already in neighbouring countries – the vast majority of whom live outside of formal camps – hope is also dwindling as they sink deeper into abject poverty.

Against this backdrop, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been forced to cut food assistance to 229,000 refugees in Jordan this month – the latest and largest in a series of reductions in food aid across the region this year due to severe funding shortfalls.

**Ten years on, ‘responsibility to protect’ must be more than words – UN officials**

**8 September** - Citing numerous crises around the world, including in Syria, Yemen and South Sudan, United Nations officials today stressed that the principle of ‘responsibility to protect’ endorsed by leaders a decade ago must be translated into action and more done to provide real protection for people in dire need.

“Ten years ago, world leaders transformed expectations about the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said at the General Assembly’s informal dialogue on the subject. “Today, on its 10th anniversary, I urgently call on governments and UN entities – especially the Security Council – to move from understanding to action.”

The principle of the responsibility to protect, which was adopted at the 2005 World Summit and is commonly referred to as R2P, holds States responsible for protecting their own populations from war crimes and crimes against humanity, and requires the international community to step in if this obligation is not met.

Mr. Ban noted that R2P was not only a question of law but “a matter of common humanity.” He used the occasion to call on Member States to create political space to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes; for stronger connections between early warning and early action; and for courage in publicly confronting and addressing signs of risk.

Mr. Ban also recalled the responsibilities of the Security Council, noting that the 15-member body is “the only body empowered under international law to authorize military action to save lives when all else fails.”

“We must do all that we can to act early, prevent atrocity crimes and support States in protecting their citizens,” he added.

Speaking on behalf of General Assembly President Sam Kutesa, Ambassador Einar Gunnarsson of Iceland told the meeting that the anniversary is an opportunity to reaffirm a collective responsibility to protect populations from war crimes and other crimes against humanity.
“A decade after the World Summit, the principle of responsibility to protect continues to receive recognition by Member States, regional mechanisms and other stakeholders,” he said, emphasising that “continued engagement is required for its wider acceptance and implementation, in accordance with international law.”

Mr. Gunnarsson added that the primary responsibility to protect lies with State authorities, and regional and international efforts should focus on supporting national capacities in detecting and preventing crimes against humanity and war crimes.

He noted that while the scale of such crimes has gradually decline, the international community continues to witness situations around the world, especially by non-State groups and actors, that constitute some of these crimes against humanity.

“The heinous atrocities and terrorist attacks by groups such as ISIL, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda and Al Shabaab are unacceptable, and we must redouble our efforts to stop them,” he said.

At a press conference later in the day, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, said that the Secretary-General’s remarks to the General Assembly constituted “a powerful call to action,” and outlined a way forward for the international community to combat atrocity crimes.

Jennifer Welsh, the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, recalled that the principle adopted in 2005 arose out of the failure to protect the populations of Rwanda and Srebrenica from crimes against humanity and war crimes.

“The principle is, at its core, a political commitment but is based on pre-existing legal obligations to protect populations from these crimes, to never allow them again,” she said.

She also highlighted the report of the Secretary-General, “A vital and enduring commitment: implementing the responsibility to protect,” noting there was an ambitious agenda that lay ahead.

“We know that in certain cases when there is concerted action, we can make a difference in addressing these kinds of situations,” she said. “And when we see in the news, on a daily basis, stark reminders of the consequences of either inaction or half-hearted action, it is imperative for the Secretary-General’s call to action in this report to be heeded.”

**Ban urges immediate de-escalation of tensions after recent attacks in Turkey**

**8 September** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today condemned the recent attacks against Turkish security personnel that have resulted in dozens of casualties, and urged an immediate de-escalation of tensions.

“He conveys his condolences to the families of the victims and expresses his deep sympathy to the Government and people of Turkey,” Mr. Ban’s spokesperson said in a statement.

“The Secretary-General is gravely concerned by the increase in violence and urges immediate de-escalation of tensions and hostilities. He continues to monitor the situation closely, including its possible impact on the region,” the statement added.

Recent weeks have seen an uptick in attacks in various parts of the country.
Literacy for all ‘must stand at the heart’ of new sustainable development agenda – UNESCO chief

8 September - Urging governments and partners to join forces for universal literacy as a key component of “the future we want,” the United Nations is emphasizing that literacy is essential to reach the newly-proposed Sustainable Development Goal on promoting inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

This is the message of International Literacy Day 2015. The Day is celebrated every year on 8 September to “raise the flag for literacy as a human right, as a force for dignity, and as a foundation for cohesive societies and sustainable development,” said Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In her remarks on the Day, Ms. Bokova said: “this message is especially vital this year, when States will adopt a new agenda for education and development to guide the next 15 years.”

“Promoting literacy must stand at the heart of this new agenda,” she said. “By empowering individual women and men, literacy helps to advance sustainable development across the board – from better healthcare and food security to eradicating poverty and promoting decent work.”

There has been progress across the world since 2000, Ms. Bokova said, “but steep challenges remain.”

“Today, 757 million adults still lack basic literacy skills – two thirds are women,” she said, and the number of out-of-school children and adolescents is on the rise, standing at 124 million worldwide – while some 250 million children of primary school age are failing to master basic literacy skills even in schooling.

“We cannot allow this to continue,” the UNESCO chief said.

With 17 days to go before the UN Sustainable Development Summit, she said literacy is essential to reach the proposed sustainable development goal to promote “inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.”

In his message on the Day, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon agreed that literacy, a human right that empowers individuals and advances societies, is needed more than ever as the United Nations prepares to adopt a new global agenda for sustainable development.

“Agenda 2030 is ambitious and transformative, aiming to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and preserve our planet,” said the UN chief, adding that its adoption by world leaders later this month offers an opportunity to recommit to promoting literacy as part of our collective push for a life of dignity for all.

Echoing Ms. Bokova, he said that more than 750 million adults in our world are illiterate. “All of these people, whatever their age, deserve the chance to learn to read. When we give them that opportunity, we will create more productive, stable and secure societies for all.”

The main global celebration for the International Day is taking place at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, where a two-day event on Literacy and Sustainable Societies (8-9 September 2015) will be organized to prepare the ground for renewed literacy efforts by countries and partners. On 8 September, a ceremony will be held to award the 2015 UNESCO International Literacy Prizes.
UN peacekeeping chief announces weapons-free zone in Central African Republic town

8 September - The United Nations has established a weapons-free zone in the town of Bambari in the Central African Republic (CAR), the world body’s peacekeeping chief announced today at the end of a four-day visit to the country.

The decision to establish the zone follows a call by the population of Bambari for further protection against armed groups, and aims to ensure the free movement of civilians as well as access by humanitarian workers to vulnerable people.

The visit by Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous comes as the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) marks one year since it began its operations.

“This is an opportunity to assess the situation and to sensitize our partners on upcoming deadlines – first the referendum on the constitution, and then elections,” Mr. Ladsous stressed during a press conference in the capital, Bangui.

Plagued by decades of instability and fighting, CAR witnessed a resumption of violence in December 2012 when the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition launched a series of attacks. A peace agreement was reached in January 2013, but the rebels seized Bangui in March 2013.

A transitional government was established, but the conflict took on increasingly sectarian overtones by December 2013 as the mainly Christian anti-Balaka movement took up arms and inter-communal clashes erupted again in and around Bangui.

Since then, the UN peacekeeping chief said, the situation has largely improved in the capital, with much of the population back at work and moving around in the streets.

 “[The upcoming elections] are an important step for national reconciliation. […] These elections must take place, before the end of the year and correctly,” Mr. Ladsous insisted.

In response to some political parties calling for another transitional government to be established, the UN official said it would be out of the question.

“The word transition has a clear definition. A schedule [for the elections] has been agreed upon by mediators, by countries in the region, and by the Security Council. The transitional government will be over on 31 December, and there will be no prolongations.”

Mr. Ladsous also highlighted a high-level meeting expected to take place on 1 October during the UN General Assembly which will focus on international commitments made by the global community for CAR.

“An example of support from the United Nations is $1 million being allocated on an exceptional basis to finance the elections,” he noted.

From his trip to Bambari, Mr. Ladsous recalled conversations with locals who said they are “tired and fed up with armed groups that fight and seek egotistical profits” at the cost of the population.

“One woman said to me: ‘we can’t continue like this. It’s unacceptable,’” he relayed, adding that he ensured her that armed groups will pay the price for acting against peace.
During the visit, Mr. Ladsous also met with MINUSCA personnel and discussed the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse, in the wake of recent allegations.

**Israeli demolition orders boost vulnerability of thousands of West Bank Palestinians, UN warns**

8 September - A new United Nations report shows that, according to official data released by the Israeli authorities, more than 11,000 demolition orders are currently outstanding in the 60 per cent of the West Bank over which Israel still retains direct control – known as Area C.

These orders – which affect an estimated 13,000 Palestinian-owned structures, including homes – are among the over 14,000 demolition orders issued by the Israeli Civil Administration between 1988 and 2014.

Area C is home to some 300,000 Palestinians and 77 per cent of the demolition orders affect structures located on privately-owned Palestinian land, according to the report, produced by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“These orders heighten the vulnerability of thousands of poor Palestinian households, some of whom are at imminent risk of forcible displacement,” said the Office.

The report comes in the context of a rise in demolitions in the West Bank, with 143 Palestinian structures having been demolished during August 2015 – the highest such number in five years.

Palestinian Bedouin communities in the central West Bank are at particularly high risk of forcible transfer due to an official Israeli plan to relocate them. Structures in eight of these communities have been demolished since 17 August, OCHA noted.

“As we have said repeatedly, the Secretary-General calls on the Israeli authorities to halt demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures, to revoke plans that would result in the forcible transfer of Palestinian communities, and to implement an inclusive planning and zoning regime that will enable Palestinians’ residential and community development needs to be met,” Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson for Ban Ki-moon, told reporters in New York.

**UN human rights chief deplores continuing civil society crackdown in Azerbaijan**

8 September - Condemning the recent imprisonment of journalist and human rights activist Khadija Ismayilova, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights voiced his concern today over the ongoing targeting and suppression of civil society and independent voices in Azerbaijan.

“Despite my repeated calls to the highest State authorities, including the President himself, undue pressure, harassment and intimidation against journalists, human rights defenders and activists by State authorities continue to be reported in Azerbaijan,” said Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein.

“I call for the immediate release of all those who have been deprived of their liberty simply for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association or peaceful assembly as well as for defending the rights of others,” he said.

According to reports, Ms. Ismayilova’s prosecution may have been connected to her work as an internationally recognized investigative journalist reporting on human rights violations and corruption in Azerbaijan.
On 1 September, she was sentenced to seven years and six months in prison on charges of embezzlement, tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship and abuse of office.

Ms. Ismayilova’s trial gave her inadequate time for consultation with her lawyers, with limited public access to hearings, according to the UN human rights office (OHCHR). Motions filed by her defence were often rejected. It allegedly failed to meet international fair trial standards.

“Ms. Ismayilova’s sentencing is just the latest example of the crackdown on independent voices in the country. Azerbaijani authorities have already jailed a number of other journalists, human rights defenders and activists, including Leyla and Arif Yunus, Intigam Aliyev, Anar Mammadli and Rasul Jafarov, on different questionable charges,” said the High Commissioner.

He also noted that his office continues to receive troubling reports of the deteriorating health of several of those imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and called on the Azerbaijani authorities to release them on humanitarian grounds.

**Mostly female anti-poaching unit from South Africa wins top UN environmental prize**

8 September - The Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit, a South African ranger group consisting mostly of women, has been named as one of the winners of the top United Nations environmental prize.

By bestowing its Champions of the Earth award to the Black Mambas, in the Inspiration and Action category, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) is recognizing the “rapid and impressive impact” the unit has made in combatting poaching and the courage required to accomplish this task, the agency said in a news release issued yesterday.

“Community-led initiatives are crucial to combatting the illegal wildlife trade and the Black Mambas highlight the importance and effectiveness of local knowledge and commitment,” said UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

“Theyir many successes are a result of their impressive courage and determination to make a difference in their community. The Black Mambas are an inspiration not only locally, but across the world to all those working to eliminate the scourge of the illegal wildlife trade.”

Since its inception in 2013, the 26-member unit has helped arrest six poachers, reduced snaring by 76 per cent, removed over 1,000 snares and put 5 poachers' camps and 2 bush meat kitchens out of action.

The area that they protect, the Balule Private Game Reserve, is home to an abundance of wildlife – including not only rhino but leopards, lions, elephants, cheetahs and hippos. It is part of the Greater Kruger National Park, a network of over 2 million hectares of protected areas that is home to thousands of birds, impalas, giraffes, wildebeest, buffalos, antelopes, hyenas, crocodiles, fish and zebras.

Protecting the rhino is vital in South Africa, where 1,215 rhinos were killed in 2014 alone. This is an increase of over 12,000 per cent since 2004 and symptomatic of a devastating epidemic that has pushed the rhino closer to the edge of extinction, according to UNEP.

Mr. Steiner noted that while their work contributes mostly toward ecosystem preservation and halting biodiversity loss, Goal 15 of the Sustainable Development Goals, it also exemplifies the action-driven solutions needed to achieve all of the SDGs, which world leaders will adopt later this month.

“With every rhino saved, the Black Mambas demonstrate that action on a local level is critical to achieving global sustainability and equity,” he stated.
Leitah Mkhabela, a member of the Black Mamba rangers, said: “I am not afraid, I know what I am doing and I know why I am doing it. If you see the poachers you tell them not to try, tell them we are here and it is they who are in danger.

“Animals deserve to live; they have a right to live. Do your part. When demand ends, the killing will end. Say yes to life. Say no to illegal rhino horn and elephant ivory.”

To date, the Champions of the Earth Awards have recognized 67 laureates in the categories of policy, science, business and civil society.

This year, the award year aims to support the Sustainable Development Goals by illustrating, through the examples of the laureates, that the transition to low-carbon, resource-efficient, inclusive and sustainable economic models is not just possible, but already in progress.

The other winners for this year will be announced in the coming weeks and will receive their honours at a ceremony to be held at the close of the Sustainable Development Summit on 27 September in New York.

**UN human rights expert condemns executions of 10 people in Chad after swift trial**

8 September - An independent United Nations human rights expert has condemned the recent executions of 10 people in Chad who were suspected of being members of the terrorist group Boko Haram following a swift process that may not have met international standards.

The 10 were executed on 29 August following a three-day trial. Chadian authorities reintroduced the death penalty in the wake of terrorist attacks carried out in the country by Boko Haram between June and July.

“While I express my deepest rejection of the terrorist attacks in June and July, I encourage the Government to react to such events within the limits of its obligations under international law,” the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns, said in a news release issued yesterday.

“The death penalty is an extreme form of punishment and, if used at all, should only be imposed after a fair trial that respects the most stringent due process guarantees as stipulated in international human rights law,” he said.

According to the news release, it is unclear whether their swift trial abided by international human rights standards, or whether those executed were able to use their right to appeal, as the hearings were moved to a secret location on the last day.

Mr. Heyns noted that the last official execution in Chad took place in 2003, and called on the Chadian authorities to reinstate the moratorium on the use of capital punishment that was put into place in 2014.

“In addition to the other problems with these executions, when dealing with a right as fundamental in nature as the right to life, this back and forth between having the death penalty and not having it, is arbitrary,” he said. “Instead of making life more valuable, as the presumed intention behind the executions was, such conduct cheapens the lives of all concerned.’”

The UN Special Rapporteurs on torture, Juan E. Méndez, and on human rights and counter terrorism, Ben Emmerson, also endorsed the statement by Mr. Heyns.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.
Safeguarding the cultural heritage of Syria and Iraq is essential for future peace, say senior UN officials

7 September - Denouncing the systematic cultural cleansing afflicting societies in Syria and Iraq as “crimes against all of humanity,” United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson and the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Irina Bokova, met in Paris today to discuss the destruction of cultural heritage and possible measures to counter the rise of violent extremism.

Meeting on the eve of the International Conference on the Protection of Victims of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East, being held in Paris on 8 September and jointly organized by the French and Jordanian Governments, in which the UNESCO Director-General will also participate, the two UN officials also discussed the destruction of heritage and illicit trafficking, as well as persecutions of communities on religious and ethnic grounds, led by violent extremists, and in the context of a rising humanitarian crisis, involving millions of refugees as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs).

A press release from UNESCO said the Deputy Secretary-General and the Director-General discussed possible measures to counter the rise of violent extremism, including with young people, to strengthen the ground for living together in all societies, through education towards a global citizenship and enhancing knowledge about different cultures and about history.

“All of this shows the humanitarian crisis cannot be separated from cultural cleansing,” said Ms Bokova. “These are part of the same strategic imperative and must stand at the heart of all efforts for peacebuilding. The cultural heritage and diversity of this region must be safeguarded for future peace, as part of the identity of all humanity.”

She highlighted here UNESCO’s work with Member States to raise awareness and strengthen action, including through the #Unite4Heritage social media campaign, as well as the importance of the mobilization of the UN General Assembly, reflected in the resolution approved in May on “Saving the Cultural Heritage of Iraq,” initiated by Germany and Iraq – with the strong support also of the Deputy-Secretary-General.

“I have come today to express solidarity and support to the actions of UNESCO, to say I stand fully behind all UNESCO’s efforts,” said Mr. Eliasson. “The destruction of humanity’s common heritage are crimes against all of humanity, and a denial of identity to future generations. I make a passionate appeal today for the preservation of this cultural heritage as an issue of our common identity.”

In this context, Mr. Eliasson welcomed and congratulated the initiative of Foreign Ministers Laurent Fabius and Nasser Judeh, of France and Jordan, in organizing the International Conference on the Protection of Victims of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East, set to open tomorrow.

He underlined the impact of the crisis on Syria and Iraq, across the region as well as on Europe and the world, and said that his message will underline the need for a political strategy bringing together all relevant actions.

Mr. Eliasson underlined the great responsibility of the UN Security Council in this respect and the rising expectations of world public opinion for action to be taken – including to support IDPs in Syria and Iraq and refugees across the region and further afield – and to chart a path towards a political solution, working with all States in the region.
As third victim of West Bank arson attack dies, UN envoy urges end to extremist violence ‘on all sides’

7 September - The United Nations special envoy on the Middle East today expressed deep sadness that Reham Dawabsha has succumb to the wounds she received in a terrorist attack in a West Bank village in late July that also killed her husband and infant son, calling the tragedy “a shocking example of the destructive nature of extremism.”

“I am deeply saddened by the death of Reham Dawabsha on the eve of her 27th birthday,” said the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, in a statement.

He said that despite the excellent medical care at Sheba Medical Center, Tel Hashomer, Ms. Dawabsha sadly succumbed to her wounds. “Reham is the third victim of the 31 July terrorist attack in Douma village which killed her husband and infant son, and wounded her four-year old son Ahmed,” underscored Mr. Mladenov, adding that his Office's thoughts and prayers are with the family and especially with little Ahmed, “now orphaned due to this heinous act.”

The young Palestinian woman was severely injured in an arson attack in the West Bank which was strongly condemned by Mr. Mladenov, the UN Security Council and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who said at the time: “Continued failures to effectively address impunity for repeated acts of settler violence have led to another horrific incident involving the death of an innocent life. This must end.”

In his statement today, Mr. Mladenov reiterated and strengthened his earlier call for justice, and noted that while acknowledging the wide condemnations issued at the time of the incident by Israeli and Palestinian leaders, “I am nevertheless concerned by the lack of progress in identifying and prosecuting the perpetrators of this outrage.”

“The tragedy of the Dawabsha family serves as a shocking example of the destructive nature of extremism. It is incumbent upon political, religious and community leaders to speak out and to act decisively against those who incite and perpetrate hatred on all sides,” he declared.

He also emphasized that the UN is determined to work with all parties to create the conditions which would enable a return to meaningful negotiations to finally resolve this conflict and bring sustainable peace to the people of Israel and Palestine.

UN agency chief and U2’s Bono urge action to address hunger needs of people fleeing conflict

7 September - As the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) continues to face challenges in funding its emergency response in Syria, the agency's Executive Director Ertharin Cousin has thanked U2 lead singer and ONE co-founder Bono, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and Ireland's Agriculture Minister Simon Coveney for their efforts to give voice and support to the world's hungry poor.

Bono and Ms. Cousin met on Sunday night at the Expo Milan 2015 special event 'It Begins With Me,' hosted by the governments of Ireland and Italy, to mobilize people in the challenge to end hunger in our lifetimes and raise awareness of the need for more resources to respond to the increasing hunger needs of people fleeing conflict.

“To end hunger we count on public will. People must raise their voices to demand a world
without hunger. This is why I am so pleased that Bono has come here to Expo to make this happen in what is a very difficult moment,” said Ms. Cousin, referring to the challenge of securing steady funding for the Syrian emergency response.

When she visited the Middle East region in mid-August, Ms. Cousin called on the international community to continue supporting Syrian refugees displaced in neighboring countries, appealing to the world “not to forget” the crisis and to provide the agency the means to meet their needs.

“For affected populations in Syria and refugees around the region, WFP food assistance provides stability,” she said. “To provide this assistance, we rely on the generosity of the international community. We simply cannot let them down,” said Ms. Cousin at the time.

Since the beginning of the year, WFP has faced critical funding shortages that forced it to reduce the level of the assistance it provides to some 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, but also in Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

“I think it is extraordinary that an organization like WFP even exists when each year you and your staff have to go out and ask for funds to do your work. In Jordan right now we have a refugee crisis and … WFP is forced to cut for lack of funds,” said Bono at yesterday's Milan Expo event. “This is shameful!”

In his opening remarks, Irish Agriculture Minister Simon Coveney, one of the driving forces behind the event, announced that Ireland will donate 60 million euros to WFP over three years, with a specific focus on refugees.

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi underlined the need for more resources to fight hunger and promised that by 2017 Italy would be back in fourth place in the country ranking for international cooperation among the G7 countries.

Italian Agriculture Minister Maurizio Martina said that we need both citizens and institutions to support the fight against hunger and Expo is the ideal venue to put fighting hunger at the top of the agenda.

**Deforestation slows, 'but we need to do better' on sustainable forest use – UN agriculture chief**

7 September - While the world's forests continue to shrink as populations increase and woodlands are converted to agriculture and other uses, over the past 25 years, the rate of net global deforestation has slowed down by more than 50 per cent, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said in a report published today.

Some 129 million hectares of forest – an area almost equivalent in size to South Africa — have been lost since 1990, according to FAO's most comprehensive forest review to date, The Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015. It covers 234 countries and territories and was presented at this week's World Forestry Congress, which kicked off today in Durban, South Africa.

The FAO study noted however, that an increasing amount of forest areas have come under protection while more countries are improving forest management. This is often done through legislation and includes the measuring and monitoring of forest resources and a greater involvement of local communities in planning and in developing policies.

"Forests play a fundamental role in combating rural poverty, ensuring food security and providing people with livelihoods. And they deliver vital environmental services such as clean air and water, the conservation of biodiversity and combating climate change,” said FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva, launching the report in Durban.

He noted an "encouraging tendency towards a reduction in rates of deforestation and carbon emissions from forests," as well as improved information that can inform good policy, noting that presently national forest inventories cover 81 per cent of global forest area, a substantial increase over the past 10 years.

"The direction of change is positive, but we need to do better," the FAO Director-General cautioned. "We will not succeed
in reducing the impact of climate change and promoting sustainable development if we do not preserve our forests and sustainably use the many resources they offer us," he added.

FAO's report stresses the critical importance of forests to people, the environment, and the global economy. The forest sector contributes about $600 billion annually to global gross domestic product (GDP) and provides employment to over 50 million people.

The report also noted that Africa and South America had the highest net annual loss of forests in 2010-2015, with 2.8 and 2 million hectares respectively, but the report notes how the rate of loss has "substantially decreased" from the previous five year period.

Globally, natural forest area is decreasing and planted forest area is increasing and while most forests remain publicly owned, ownership by individuals and communities has increased. In all cases FAO stresses the importance of sustainable forest management practices.

"The management of forests has improved dramatically over the last 25 years. This includes planning, knowledge sharing, legislation, policies - a whole range of important steps that countries have implemented or are implementing," said Kenneth MacDicken, leader of FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment Team.

He underscored how since 1990 the designation of additional forest land for conservation increased by some 150 million ha and that forest in protected areas has increased by over 200 million hectares.

Currently, forest area primarily designated for biodiversity conservation accounts for 13 percent of the world's forest, or 524 million hectares, with the largest areas reported in Brazil and the United States.

Over the last five year period Africa reported the highest annual increase in the area of forest for conservation while Europe, North and Central American and North America reported the lowest compared to previous reporting periods, while the increase reported by Asia for 2010-2015 was lower than that reported for 2000-1010 but higher than the increase reported in the 1990s.

Deforestation and forest degradation increase the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, but forest and tree growth absorbs carbon dioxide which is the main greenhouse gas. FAO notes how a more sustainable management of forests will result in a reduction in carbon emissions from forests and has a vital role to play in addressing the impacts of climate change.

FAO has estimated that total carbon emissions from forests decreased by more than 25 per cent between 2001 and 2015, mainly due to a slowdown in global deforestation rates.

At governing body, UN atomic energy chief spotlights sustainable development, Iran nuclear deal

7 September - Supporting the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be a key focus for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in years to come, Director General Yukiya Amano told a meeting of the Agency's Board of Governors in Vienna today, where he also provided an update on the application of nuclear safeguards in Iran, Democratic Republic of Korea and Syria.

Touching on a range of other topics, the IAEA chief also spoke about the role of nuclear energy in the run-up to the global climate summit in Paris later this year, presented the Nuclear Security Report 2015 and encouraged the active participation of Member States in the IAEA's Scientific Forum, to be held next week, focusing on the industrial application of nuclear technology and its importance for development.

During its five-day meeting, the 35-member Board will discuss measures to strengthen international cooperation in nuclear,
radiation, transport and waste safety, and the IAEA's technical cooperation activities, among other topics.

In his statement, Mr. Amano welcomed the recognition of the importance of science and technology for development in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which are expected to be approved in a few weeks' time.

“The Agency has for many years made a major contribution to development by making nuclear science and technology available in areas such as food production, water management and agriculture. Our work deserves greater recognition,” he said.

Mr. Amano highlighted the important role the IAEA can play in assisting countries to meet the SDG target of reducing cancer-related deaths by a third in the next 15 years. “I believe this is an achievable goal provided there are strong partnerships among the international organizations concerned,” he said, noting that through its technical cooperation and human health programmes, the IAEA “has a long history of supporting Member States in developing the capacity and infrastructure for cancer control.

The IAEA chief went on to draw delegates' attention to his report on the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident in Japan in 2011, which had been made available ahead of the IAEA's General Conference next week. He also presented his fourth and final annual report on the implementation of the IAEA Action Plan on Nuclear Safety, adopted in the wake of the accident. While the implementation period for the Action Plan is coming to an end, work that began under the Action Plan will continue.

On another key issue, he said noted that many countries remain interested in nuclear power, not least due to the role it can play in fighting climate change. “Nuclear power is one of the lowest emitters of carbon dioxide among energy sources, considering emissions through the entire life cycle” said Mr. Amano.

Turning to nuclear safeguards, Mr. Amano expressed concern about the nuclear programme of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), reporting that the Agency remains unable to undertake verification in the country and its knowledge the DPRK's nuclear programme is limited. Using satellite imagery, the IAEA has observed renovation and construction activity at Yongbyon, which appears to be consistent with the country's own statements that it is further developing its nuclear capabilities.

“I call upon the DPRK to comply fully with its obligations, to cooperate promptly with the Agency, and to resolve all outstanding issues,” he added.

Mr. Amano went on to say the Agency continued to verify the non-diversion of nuclear material declared by Iran under its Safeguards Agreement. But it was not in a position to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities.

He noted that the Board had authorized him in August to undertake the verification and monitoring of Iran's nuclear-related commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreed by the so called 'E3/EU+3' countries – composed of China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – and Iran.

He welcomed the fact that Iran would implement the Additional Protocol to its safeguards agreement with the Agency. “This will give the Agency greater access to information and to sites in Iran,” he said. “Implementation of the Additional Protocol is an essential prerequisite for the Agency to be able to provide, in due course, credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran.”

Mr. Amano also addressed safeguards implementation in Syria and urged the country to “cooperate fully with the IAEA in connection with all unresolved issues.”
In phone calls on migration crisis, Ban urges European leaders to 'be voice of those in need of protection'

6 September - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appealed to European leaders “to be the voice of those in need of protection” and to quickly find a joint approach to the refugee and migration crisis that shares responsibilities equitably, as Germany and Austria continue to welcome thousands of people fleeing their war-torn homelands.

According to a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York, the Secretary-General spoke by telephone with several European leaders today to discuss the migration crisis.

Recognizing the challenges that large-scale refugee and migration flows pose to Member States, the UN chief appealed to the leaders to be the voice of those in need of protection and to quickly find a joint approach to share responsibilities equitably.”

Mr. Ban's call echoes similar appeals from top UN agency officials who have appealed for swift action as the migration crisis in Europe has deepened over the past week.

Yesterday, the UN refugee agency, which has appealed to the European Union to admit up to 200,000 asylum-seekers fleeing conflict zones like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, welcomed the decision of Austria and Germany to receive thousands of refugees and migrants crossing the border from Hungary over the past 72 hours.

The agency has repeatedly stressed the urgent need to put in place an emergency plan to manage the crisis, and Friday, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres recommended several concrete proposals, saying that dealing with the biggest influx of refugees into Europe for decades requires a “massive common effort” and break with the current fragmented approach, which he said has led Europe overall to fail to find an effective common response.

On Thursday, moved by the “heart-breaking” image of a drowned Syrian refugee boy who washed up on a beach in Turkey that ricocheted around the world on social media, along with equally painful images of children being passed over barbed wire fences by desperate parents, Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) declared: “It is not enough for the world to be shocked by these images. Shock must be matched by action.”

According to today's statement, Mr. Ban in his phone conversations assured European leaders of the UN's readiness to continue supporting their efforts to develop a response that is effective, feasible and in line with universal human rights and humanitarian standards, including the right to claim asylum.

The Secretary-General also commended the leaders for having voiced concern about increasing xenophobia, discrimination, and violence against migrants and refugees in Europe.

“He hoped that any manifestation of these phenomena would be addressed firmly and without delay,” added the statement.
UN hails decision by Austria and Germany to take in thousands of migrants and refugees at Hungary border

5 September - As Austria and Germany begin receiving thousands of refugees and migrants who crossed the border last night from Hungary, the United Nations refugee agency hailed the decision as "political leadership based on humanitarian values," while also applauding Austrian and German civil society groups gearing up to assist people as they enter their countries.

In a statement the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) welcomed the decision of Austria and Germany to take in thousands of refugees that had been at the border of Hungary.

Praising the civil society groups and individuals of Austria and Germany who are mobilizing in large numbers to welcome and provide aid to people as they enter, UNHCR said that "all over Europe, [we are] witnessing a remarkable outpouring of public response, including from faith-based organizations, NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and individuals, in many cases driving governments to change policies and rhetoric."

However, the agency warns that the current concentration of refugees and migrants in a small number of countries willing to receive them is not a sustainable solution.

"There is clearly an urgent need to put in place an emergency plan to manage the refugee crisis," says UNHCR, recalling the concrete proposals put forward yesterday by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, who said that dealing with the biggest influx of refugees into Europe for decades requires a "massive common effort" and break with the current fragmented approach, which he said has led Europe overall to fail to find an effective common response.

"A very preliminary estimate would indicate a potential need to increase relocation opportunities to as many as 200,000 places," he recommended. "This can only work if it goes hand in hand with adequate reception capacities, especially in Greece. Solidarity cannot be the responsibility of only a few EU member States. Europe is facing a moment of truth."

Mr. Guterres' call to action came just hours before UNHCR expressed sadness at the death of a 50-year-old man, on Friday, near a refugee reception centre in the Hungarian town of Bicske.

UNHCR staff on the ground were gathering exact details about the circumstance of the death. However, initial reports suggested the man falling down and hitting his head against train tracks, while trying to run away from the police at the train station. An ambulance was called which tried to provide medical assistance on the spot, but the man reportedly died after 50 minutes of the incident.

"This is a shocking incident," said Montserrat Feixas Vihé, UNHCR's regional representative for Central Europe in Budapest. "All our thoughts and sympathies are with his family."

The incident apparently happened when refugees and migrants were brought from the Keleti train station in Budapest refused to move to a refugee reception centre. After a long standoff over 200 of them started to get off and ran away from the police.

"This tragic death illustrates the desperation of those arriving in Europe in search of safety," UNHCR's Feixas Vihé added.

"We urge the Hungarian authorities to put in place immediate and adequate emergency reception, assistance and registration..."
On International Day, Ban calls on people everywhere to act charitably in the face of human suffering

5 September - On the International Day of Charity, marked annually on 5 September, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is calling on people everywhere to volunteer and act charitably in the face of human suffering.

“At a time when the need for humanitarian assistance has never been higher and when there are more refugees and displaced people than at any time since the end of the Second World War, charities play an increasingly vital role in meeting human need,” the UN chief said in a message.

The International Day coincides with the anniversary of the death of Mother Teresa, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 for her work to overcome poverty. The UN chief recalled that upon receiving the prize, she famously gave the money that came with it to some of the poorest people in India.

He said such expressions of solidarity help us in our shared quest to live together in harmony and build a peaceful and sustainable future for all.

“United Nations development and humanitarian agencies also rely on donations from the public as well as the generosity of governments to continue their lifesaving work in response to development challenges, natural disasters, armed conflicts and other emergencies,” Mr. Ban added.

He also highlighted that the resources, knowledge and ingenuity of philanthropic and volunteer organizations will be invaluable partners in implementing the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will be adopted by UN Member States at the end of month.

Ban Ki-moon said this is in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, a series of bold measures adopted by UN Member States in the Ethiopian capital this past July to overhaul global finance practices and generate investments for tackling a range of economic, social and environmental challenges.