‘Peace, stability and security’ vital for South Sudan’s desperate, war-weary people, says top UN relief official

9 February - Continued conflict in South Sudan risks depriving the country of a generation of “lost” children, warned United Nations humanitarian chief Valerie Amos today during a press conference in Juba, the capital of the strife-torn nation.

Ms. Amos, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, added that continued economic stagnation would hold back development and prevent support for essential sectors like health and education.

She made her comments at the end of a three-day tour of South Sudan with UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Special Envoy Forest Whitaker, during which the two saw the impact of the crisis on people caught in the middle of fighting.

“People need peace, stability and security,” she said in a plea to those engaged in the conflict. “It is heartrending to see the suffering of the people.”

Stressing the fact the 2.5 million people urgently need help with food, she described the tour she took with Mr. Whitaker, Academy Award-winning actor and Goodwill Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation, through Ayod county in Jonglei state.

“People are desperate for peace. They are tired of living in fear. Many have had to flee several times. They are exhausted. They lack water; they are extremely worried for their children, who are not in school and at risk of being recruited into armed groups. Sexual violence is rife. All people want to live in safety, security and stability.”
During the trip, the two also saw the work of humanitarian organizations, which helped 3.6 million people in the past year, containing a cholera epidemic and vaccinating nearly 1 million children against measles and polio. She said humanitarians showed extraordinary commitment under difficult and dangerous circumstances and drew attention to the 13 humanitarian workers who had died since the conflict began, and the constant threat of kidnapping and looting of supplies and equipment they faced.

Paying tribute to the civilian protection efforts made by the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), she said that she and Mr. Whitaker had discussed the humanitarian, economic and political situation with President Salva Kiir and his Ministers, agreeing on the need to stop violence and immediately secure a sustainable peace.

The security situation in South Sudan has steadily deteriorated since political in-fighting between President Kiir and his former Vice-President, Riek Machar, started in mid-December 2013. The hostilities subsequently turned into a full-fledged conflict that has sent nearly 100,000 civilians fleeing to UN bases around the country. A cease-fire was recently agreed between the two leaders and their respective factions, but without a broader agreement on running the world’s youngest country.

After the press conference in Juba, Ms. Amos and Mr. Whitaker flew to Nairobi, where they addressed the joint UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) High-Level Event on the Humanitarian Crisis in South Sudan, where States pledged some $618 million to support the humanitarian response.

While the $1.4 billion in humanitarian assistance contributed by the international community, including IGAD Member States, makes South Sudan the world’s best funded appeal in 2014, Ms. Amos stressed the need to maintain support, and pointed to a rise in the number of people needing assistance in 2015 and to a projected increase in funding needed to $1.8 billion.

““If we receive $600 million of that by the end of February, we can take advantage of the dry season – which lasts until May - to reach more people in need and to pre-position supplies,” Ms Amos said, underscoring the need to avert further humanitarian deterioration in the country. “Thousands of children are suffering from malnutrition. The threat of hunger and disease is real.”

Ms. Amos noted that almost half a million South Sudanese people had sought refuge in neighbouring countries, mostly in border areas, where they lacked access to food and basic services, and she warned that without peace, a “significant regional impact” could be safely predicted, and she called on IGAD and the wider international community to pressurise parties to end the violence.

Mr. Whitaker joined her call, pointing specifically to the conflict’s “brutal” impact on children in the country.

“I met boys and girls who are not being educated, and are part of an estimated half a million children who have dropped out of school,” he said. “Thousands have been recruited by armed groups, and are fighting wars instead of learning. Only with peace can young people in South Sudan play an important role in rebuilding their lives and face the future without fear.”
UN rights report points to ‘increasing regularity’ of attacks on girls seeking education

9 February - A new United Nations human rights report seeking to analyse the problem of attacks against girls trying to access education found that schools in at least 70 different countries were attacked in the five years between 2009 and 2014, with many attacks specifically targeting girls, parents and teachers advocating for gender equality in education.

“Attacks against girls accessing education persist and, alarmingly, appear in some countries to be occurring with increasing regularity,” the background paper notes. “The educational rights of girls and women are often targeted due to the fact that they represent a challenge to existing gender and age-based systems of oppression.”

The background paper, which will be presented to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to contribute to the development of its general recommendation on access to education, and which will also be published in advance of the 2015 High-level Review of Security Council resolution 1325, points to significant progress made towards guaranteeing education for all in many countries, while noting that girls still face barriers to full enjoyment of rights to, within and through education.

The report notes several recent cases of attacks against girls accessing education, which have highlighted the fragility of achievements in increasing accessibility, availability, adaptability, acceptability and quality of education for all.

Among the examples are the murder in December 2014 of more than 100 children in a Pakistani Taliban attack at an army school in Peshawar, the abduction of nearly 300 schoolgirls in April 2014 by the Boko Haram movement in northeast Nigeria and the 2012 shooting of education activist Malala Yousafzai by members of the Taliban in Pakistan.

It also points to several incidents of poisoning and acid attacks against schoolgirls in Afghanistan between 2012 and 2014, the reported forced removal of girls from schools in Somalia to become ‘wives’ of Al-Shabaab fighters in 2010, and the abduction and rape of girls at a Christian school in India in July 2013.

Attacks on girls’ education take several forms and in some instances are not explicitly motivated by the desire to deny girls an education but reflect, instead, the violence experienced by girls and women in all areas of their public and private lives, the report notes.

“Attacks involving sexual violence against teachers and girls in educational facilities or during the journey to or from them have been reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Haiti, Indonesia, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, the Philippines and Syria,” the paper notes.

Attacks of all varieties have a ripple effect, impacting the lives of girls and communities who are directly concerned, but also sending a signal to other parents and guardians that schools are not safe places for girls.

When girls are removed from education because of security fears and concerns about their subsequent marriageability, additional human rights violations may occur, like child and forced marriage, domestic violence, early pregnancy, exposure to other harmful practices, trafficking and sexual and labour exploitation.

Among the paper’s conclusions and recommendations, it calls for measures to address the social, cultural, political, economic and security context within which violations occur, emphasising the need to improve the availability, accessibility, adaptability and acceptability of education for girls, while simultaneously launching programmes to tackle discriminatory...
cultural and social attitudes and practices.

Noting that transformation of unequal power structures based on gender and age is a lengthy and difficult process, the report also calls for the involvement of boys and men in the process of change.

**UNICEF, David Beckham launch new initiative to boost funding for world’s children**

9 February - International football icon and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Goodwill Ambassador, David Beckham, today announced his latest fundraising initiative, launched in tandem with the UN agency and aimed at boosting assistance for the world’s youth, amid the planet’s worsening humanitarian crises.

“Today, the need to help children has never been greater, and since retiring, I have more time and I want to do so much more,” Mr. Beckham said in a press release marking the unveiling of 7: The David Beckham UNICEF Fund – his “ground-breaking initiative” to protect millions of children around the world from danger.

“This is me stepping up my support – because I can, because I want to, because the outcome will help change the lives of millions of children,” he continued.

“Everything I have done, my football career, my family, has led to this point – this is the moment for me to do what I can to help children in every corner of the world. This is something I want my own children to be proud of.”

Mr. Beckham’s latest effort comes after one of the most devastating years for children on record.

As many as 15 million children are caught up in violent conflicts in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and in the Occupied Palestinian territory – including those displaced in their own countries or living as refugees outside their homeland, according to UNICEF.

At the same time, schools have increasingly been commandeered by combatants for military purposes amid a rise in attacks on education and health facilities. Overall, an estimated 230 million children live in countries and areas affected by armed conflicts.

Children are also at serious risk from a wide range of factors beyond immediate emergencies. 168 million across the globe are engaged in child labour and many others are victims of sexual violence, trafficking and female genital mutilation.

The launch of 7, named in honour of Mr. Beckham’s famed jersey number, will inaugurate a series of fundraising initiatives in which the former England captain will plan to “raise millions and speak out for children all over the world.”

Once fundraising objectives are achieved, UNICEF would be able to provide child protection services and counselling support to children in El Salvador, the country with the highest homicide rate among children in the world; provide water pumps and train communities to maintain them in Burkina Faso, where currently 1 in 5 child deaths are caused by diarrhoea; and support breastfeeding mothers to give children the best start in life in Papua New Guinea, where child malnutrition has caused stunted growth in nearly half of all children under the age of five, the UNICEF press release explained.

“There are some very exciting plans ahead and I am so proud to be part of this,” Mr. Beckham added.

Paloma Escudero, from UNICEF’s Global Management Team, acknowledged Mr. Beckham’s longstanding efforts to “speaking up for those who need it most – the world’s most vulnerable children,” noting that the football star had already dedicated 10 years of work as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador.

“David has raised awareness of major dangers facing children – including malnutrition, Ebola and AIDS – and has travelled
with UNICEF to Sierra Leone, South Africa, Thailand and most recently the Philippines, where he helped raise vital funds for children affected by Typhoon Haiyan,” she affirmed.

“Through 7: The David Beckham UNICEF Fund, we can act together to drive positive change for children.”

**At thematic debate, UN calls on Member States to boost funding for post-2015 development**

9 February - The world has embarked on a “crucial last stretch” to the post-2015 development agenda and towards securing a sustainable future for all, United Nations Deputy-Secretary-General Jan Eliasson declared today, adding that the international community would finally have a chance to provide “a life of dignity” for millions of people.

“There are high expectations that the United Nations and its Member States will be a catalyst for setting the direction for transformative change,” Mr. Eliasson said this morning at a High-Level Thematic Debate on Means of Implementation for a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda.

“You, the Member States, are on the final stretch of an historic journey to define the content of an ambitious post-2015 development agenda.”

Addressing the debate which opened today and will wrap up tomorrow at UN Headquarters in New York, Mr. Eliasson reminded delegates that 2015 would witness the marking of “three major milestones” – the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in July; the post-2015 summit scheduled for New York, in September; and a critical UN climate conference set for December in Paris.

As momentum builds towards these events, he continued, Member States will be pressed to answer how they plan “to deliver on these ambitious goals.”

“It is clear that today’s financing and investment patterns will not deliver sustainable development – even though current global savings are actually sufficient to finance sustainable development needs,” Mr. Eliasson explained. “Intensified international cooperation on many fronts and in new ways is needed to change the way finance for development works.”

This year marks wrap up of the landmark UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which world leaders agreed on 15 years ago. There has been significant progress in meeting the targets. For example, global poverty has been halved well ahead of the 2015 deadline; in developing countries, 90 per cent of children now enjoy primary education; the number of people lacking access to improved drinking water has halved, and the fight against malaria and tuberculosis has shown results, according to the UN.

But challenges persist, and with the deadline of the MDGs set for the end of this year, the UN will craft a new set of targets known as the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Globally, 73 million young people are looking for work and many more are trapped in exploitative jobs. In recent years, more than two and a half million more children in affluent countries fell into poverty, bringing the total above 76 million.

Echoing the Deputy-Secretary-General’s appeal for better financing to satisfy the “ambition, breadth and scope” of the new UN development agenda, President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, warned that the additional funding needed to eradicate extreme poverty ranged from $135 billion to $195 billion every two years, while investments required in critical infrastructure projects spanning transport, energy, water and sanitation are estimated to cost between $5 and $7 trillion per year. As a result, he said, it is clear that the resources required remained “enormous” and would have to be “mobilized from all sources” – domestic and external to public and private.

“The new universal development agenda represents our collective commitment to humankind and the planet,” affirmed Mr. Kutesa.
Together, we must spare no effort to formulate and agree on a framework for development and international cooperation that improves the everyday lives of people worldwide, and protects the environment.

**Government institutions must deliver equally to provide ‘true stability,’ Ban tells Dubai summit**

9 February - Opening the 2015 Government Summit in Dubai, the Secretary-General today drew attention to the world’s pressing security and development challenges, calling on Governments to help foster a more peaceful and sustainable future, and describing how the United Nations can give support.

He highlighted the international turmoil blighting the world, listing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, instability in Libya and Yemen, and the threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria and Iraq among the main situations damaging prospects for long-term peace and stability.

“I have repeatedly condemned the repugnant and cowardly behaviour of those committing atrocious acts against innocent civilians,” said Mr. Ban. “At the same time, I have insisted on the need to strictly respect human rights. Any rights abuses committed in the name of counter-terror are morally wrong and strategically counterproductive.”

Radicalization would be best addressed if leaders tackled marginalization and exclusion, and listened to their people’s voices when speaking up about emergencies but also more general issues, like the need for greater transparency, accountability and democracy.

“Leaders who place themselves above the law and their people put their own governments at risk of collapse,” he warned. “True stability demands trusted institutions that deliver for people equally.”

Public institutions serving the common good are vital to efficient governance and also to improving equity, justice and stability, and he welcomed initiatives aimed at cutting red tape, lowering costs and fighting fraud.

The Secretary-General said he insisted on transparency and accountability at the UN, with the aim of creating a more modern, dynamic and responsive organisation that earned even better public trust. He disclosed his financial assets and asked all senior officials across the UN to be just as open.

As the UN marked its 70th year, he underlined the need for the Organization to better serve Governments and people, and to enable the world to take transformative steps towards a more sustainable, equitable and peaceful world.

He pointed to ongoing work to review peace operations and peacebuilding, and internal reforms for better approaches to human resources, technology and management, all of which would serve the overarching goal of enabling the UN to help better implement the sustainable development goals.

Listing the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July, the special summit on sustainable development in New York in September, and the climate change conference in Paris in December, he underlined their significance and the opportunity they offered Governments to make ambitious plans for a more sustainable future.

“We are the first generation that can end poverty and maybe the last that can avert the worst impacts of climate change,” he said. “The success of these plans will depend on accountable and transparent governments that engage people in decisions affecting them.”

States would have more opportunity than ever to cooperate with civil society groups in policy-making and should also involve more citizens in co-designing solutions to development challenge.

“This new epoch calls for a new governance model – one that is ready for the future, accountable, transparent, inclusive and..."
participatory,” he urged. “Our discussions at this Government Summit can help realize that vision and usher in a life of dignity for all.”

Fight against child labour gaining momentum in Kosovo, UN agency says

9 February - The International Labour Organization (ILO) today spotlighted the fight against child labour in Kosovo, where, it said, children as young as 10 are forced to work on garbage dumps or in the fields risking their health, and noted that progress is being made to eliminate such “unacceptable ways of providing financial support to a family.”

“Public authorities, communities and families all have their share of responsibility in fighting these abuses and they should act on these responsibilities,” Lindita Boshtrakaj, ILO National Programme Manager for the child labour project in Kosovo, said today.

To illustrate the plight of families forced to send their children to work in the fields, ILO focused on the story of Sevdije Morina, a mother of five in the Kosovar village of Vrajak, whose children help her with the hard farm work – harvesting onions and grapes.

“I was forced to stop sending them to school so that they could work more in the fields and the vineyard,” she said, according to ILO, adding that the children often handle pesticides and dangerous tools.

Her 12-year-old daughter Haxhere said: “There have been cases when we’ve been injured when hoeing. And once I cut my hand with an axe. Since we did not have a car or other transportation, we had to walk the six kilometres from Vrajak to Ratkoc to take the children to hospital.”

Coming from poor families, some of them have to start to work as early as the age of 10, ILO said.

“Working on a garbage dump or in agriculture, they risk their health and even their lives. For many of them, combining school and work is a major challenge,” ILO said.

The UN agency also reported that for dozens of children collecting waste at a local dumpsite in Koshtova, a small village on the outskirts of the northern town of Mitrovica, working conditions may be even more difficult than for the mother of five and her children.

“They often hurt themselves when they collect the garbage or run to meet a new truck arriving at the dumpsite,” it said.

“They rush because the winner of the race takes all and can fill his or her bag alone. Everybody accepts this tacit agreement to avoid fights between the children.”

The ILO reported that it and Kosovo’s Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare are working to find quick and adequate solutions, and so far, the project has led to the formulation of the Kosovo Action Plan for Prevention and Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

The so-called Administrative Instruction 05/2013 on the Prevention and Prohibition of Hazardous Child Labour in Kosovo was approved in July 2014, which contains the updated Hazardous Child Labour List drafted with the help of the ILO.

And since March 2013, members of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce are obliged to observe the ILO’s four fundamental labour principles, including the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and the elimination of child labour, forced labour and discrimination at work.

So far, according to ILO, 40 members of the Chamber of Commerce adopted codes of conduct on combating child labour in their supply chains and communities. In addition, occupational safety and health issues will be mainstreamed into the compulsory education (grades 8-9) and upper secondary school curricula.
The ILO is devoted to promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights, and helps advance the creation of decent work and the economic and working conditions that give working people and business people a stake in lasting peace, prosperity and progress.

Its four strategic objectives are: promote and realize standards and fundamental principles and rights at work; create greater opportunities for women and men to decent employment and income; enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all; and strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.

**With regional simulation, UN agency boosts readiness for foot and mouth disease in Balkans**

9 February - The United Nations agricultural agency has joined the European Union in helping to boost Balkan countries’ preparations for any possible foot-and-mouth disease outbreak by running simulations of contingency plans for rapid responses, according to a press release issued today.

The Balkans has been given special attention by the European Commission for the control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, the Secretariat of which is based at Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), because of its proximity to infected countries further south and east and because the region comprises both EU and non-EU member countries.

“The simulation exercise in the Balkans is important to the countries involved as it presents an opportunity to run a first test of their state of preparedness since the last major crisis in the region in 2011, when Bulgaria had to control outbreaks in wildlife and domestic animals,” said Keith Sumption, Executive Secretary of the Commission, after the exercise.

Bulgaria, Serbia and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were the subjects of the desktop simulation, where government veterinary services projected a simultaneous outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the three countries, testing the participating countries’ abilities to prevent spread, as well as their coordination and cooperation.

“The observers were impressed by the response,” said Mr. Sumption. “The exercise met its target of testing the management response to a complex and evolving FMD outbreak, including testing capacity to communicate within and between the countries and with international organizations, and the ability to prioritise tasks at national and local level.”

Although not dangerous to human health, foot-and-mouth disease, which is a virus affecting cloven-hoofed animals, such as cattle, buffaloes, pigs, sheep, goats and deer, causes serious production losses, constraints on international trade and can impact activities like tourism.

An outbreak in the United Kingdom in 2001 cost that country $16 billion and resulted in 10 million sheep and cattle being culled in order to halt further spread of the virus.

Around 40 countries each year declare epidemics annually and, although European Union States are currently virus free, it is present in parts of in the European neighbourhood and in around 100 countries in Africa, the Middle East, large parts of the Eurasian landmass and some areas in South America.

In recent years, the Commission, which runs a broad programme to strengthen the capacity of veterinary services in Europe, has trained around 500 veterinarians across Europe in immediate response capabilities. It has also established an emergency training course for vets for crisis situations and built a knowledge bank to share experience and improve simulation exercises.

A second multi-country simulation exercise is being planned in the Balkans in July, which aims to incorporate lessons learned from the recent exercise and include field activities.

“Simulation exercises are an effective way to identify weaknesses that could result in catastrophic consequences in a real
crisis, and to bring attention to the need for investment in preparedness,” said Mr. Sumption.

**Middle East diplomatic Quartet urges resumption of negotiations ‘as soon as possible’**

**9 February** - The European Union, United Nations, United States and Russia, representing the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East Peace Process, have urged the resumption of Israeli-Palestinians negotiations “as soon as possible” and reached out for donor funding to accelerate reconstruction of Gaza “to address the basic needs of the Palestinian population and to ensure stability.”

This statement followed discussions over the weekend in Munich, Germany, by the Quartet principals – Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, US Secretary of State John Kerry, European Union (EU) High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and UN Deputy Secretary General Jan Eliasson, representing the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon.

“The Quartet underlined the importance of the parties resuming negotiations as soon as possible,” the statement said.

“A sustainable peace requires the Palestinians’ aspirations for statehood and sovereignty and those of Israelis for security to be fulfilled through negotiations based on the two-state solution,” it said.

The Quartet also expressed its deep concern over “the difficult situation in Gaza where the pace of reconstruction needs to be accelerated to address the basic needs of the Palestinian population and to ensure stability” and “stressed that donor funding is critical.”

Specifically, the Quartet expressed support for the recent joint letter by Egypt and Norway, as well as the joint statement by the Secretaries-General of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, urging donors to disburse as soon as possible their financial commitments made at the October 2014 Cairo Conference, including the funding of UN agencies carrying out vital operations in Gaza for both the refugee and non-refugee populations.

The Quartet also recalled the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative – with its vision for a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict – and the vital role of Arab partners.

And the group expressed their warm appreciation for the tireless work of outgoing UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry.

**UN chief welcomes resumption of negotiations to ‘steer Yemen through’ political impasse**

**8 February** - The Secretary-General has today welcomed the announcement that the UN-facilitated negotiations in Yemen will reconvene on Monday.

According to a statement released by the Secretary-General’s Spokesperson, Mr. Ban’s Special Adviser on Yemen, Mr. Jamal Benomar, will bring the various political parties and constituencies together to discuss how to peacefully steer Yemen through the current challenging period.

“The Secretary-General reiterates the full commitment of the United Nations to assist the Yemenis in finding a consensual solution to the current political impasse,” said the statement. “He urges all sides to resolve themselves to complete the political transition as set forth in the Implementation Mechanism of the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and the Peace and National Partnership Agreement.”
The UN chief also called on all sides to negotiate in good faith and in the spirit of compromise, further urging all sides to cooperate with his Special Adviser on Yemen, Mr. Benomar, who enjoys his full support.

**Timely preparations ‘imperative’ to credible, free, transparent elections in Nigeria, says UN chief**

**8 February** - The Secretary-General noted today the decision of the Nigerian Independent Electoral Commission to postpone the general elections, initially scheduled for 14 February 2015, and urged the electoral authorities to take all necessary measures, such as the rapid distribution of the remaining Permanent Voter Cards, to enable all eligible citizens, including those displaced, to exercise their right to vote in a timely manner.

“This is imperative for ensuring a credible, free and transparent election,” the Secretary-General said in a statement issued by his spokesperson, which noted that Mr. Ban spoke by phone to President Goodluck Jonathan and to opposition candidate Muhammadu Buhari in recent days.

In those conversations, the Secretary-General encouraged respect for the Abuja Accord which both men willingly adopted and which commits them to non-violence, peace and tolerance during the elections.

Mr. Ban looks to Nigeria's authorities to uphold their commitment to ensure a violence-free election and put in place adequate security measures so that citizens across the country are able to exercise their civic duty safely and without fear.

He hopes that the forthcoming elections will meet the high expectations of the Nigerian people and the international community.

“The successful conduct of these polls would strengthen Nigeria's democracy and enable the country to continue to play a leading role in the promotion of regional peace and security,” the statement said.

**Ban meets new Saudi king, looks forward to cooperation on development, climate, regional crises**

**8 February** - Paying tribute to the legacy of the late Saudi Arabian king Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the United Nations Secretary-General today looked forward to continued “fruitful cooperation” with the country’s new king, Salman bin Abdulaziz, after a meeting in which the two discussed sustainable development, climate change and regional peace and security.

Mr. Ban said he was “profoundly concerned” about the appalling crimes that continue to be committed in Syria by all sides and he stressed that recent meetings in Cairo and Moscow emphasised the need to find a political solution based on the Geneva Communiqué.

“I welcome the international re-engagement for a political solution. I also welcome Saudi Arabia's proposal for a follow-up meeting,” he said. “A solution to the crisis will only be found through political negotiations. At the same time, we must urgently do more for the many people who are suffering.”

The humanitarian Summit being hosted by Kuwait on 31 March offered a chance to raise funds for the people of Syria and the neighbouring countries affected by the Syrian conflict and he requested that a high-level Saudi delegation attend the Syrian Pledging Conference.

He also welcomed the reopening of Saudi Arabia's embassy in Baghdad and the establishment of a Consulate in Erbil, which he hoped would deepen cooperation between the two countries, especially on countering terrorism.
“The UN stands ready to support the region in developing a comprehensive and joint response to the threat of Daesh [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)],” said Mr. Ban, turning to the threat of terrorism and the contribution that the UN can make to efforts to counter it.

Thanking Saudi Arabia for its support of the Counter-Terrorism Centre, he drew attention to the UN’s efforts to address terrorism through Security Council resolutions and committees, the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and nearly 20 legal instruments.

“We agreed that everything possible must be done to reduce terrorism, both from Yemen and from Daesh,” said Mr. Ban, noting that he had also discussed the “very serious situation in Yemen” and the work being carried out by UN Special Envoy Jamal Benomar, who was working to find a way out of the current political crisis and a return to the path of the peaceful political transition.

Mr. Ban and King Salman also discussed the “dire plight” of the people of Gaza and their urgent need for assistance and the Secretary-General welcomed the King’s reaffirmation of support for the Arab Peace Initiative.

During his visit, Mr. Ban also met with several other senior officials, including the Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources and the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Ban also met with the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani, to discuss several issues of common concern, focusing mainly on the situation in Yemen and efforts to counter terrorism.

As he looked forward to further close cooperation to tackle the many challenges facing the region and the world, Mr. Ban stressed that progress must come with human rights protection, including protection of the rights of women and all people’s fundamental freedoms.