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Millions in Iraq need greater humanitarian support, warns top UN relief official

9 June - Millions of people are in need of a greater assistance across Iraq, said Stephen O’Brien, the new Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, following a two-day visit to the strife-torn country.

“‘It’s imperative at this critical time we do more to mitigate the suffering of the Iraqi people. Much has been done, but the needs continue to increase and more is needed,’ stated Mr. O’Brien, who assumed his post as UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at the beginning of June.

The humanitarian situation in Iraq is dire. Since January 2014, more than three million Iraqis have been displaced from their homes and over eight million people are in need of assistance that aid agencies cannot always provide them with, due to lack of access or because of funding challenges.

On his first mission in his capacity as Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. O’Brien yesterday visited Baghdad, where he met people recently displaced from Ramadi. Today, exactly one year after Mosul fell, causing mass displacement, he visited a camp for internally displaced people in Erbil, as well as refugees from Syria.

"All the families I spoke with had heart-breaking stories of fear, flight, loss and grief. International humanitarian law obliges all those engaged in fighting to protect civilians during hostilities, including by refraining from targeting them,” urged the Under Secretary-General.
During his meetings, he discussed progress and challenges in delivering aid with governmental representatives in Baghdad, including the Iraqi President Fuad Masum and Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al Jafaari, among other senior officials. In Erbil, he held similar discussions with Kurdistan Regional Government officials, including the Prime Minister Nichirvan Barzani.

“I emphasized the commitment of the United Nations and partners to work closely with the authorities in the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We are committed to meet the most urgent needs, wherever they arise,” noted Stephen O’Brien. As fighting continues, he expressed fear that the humanitarian situation will further deteriorate, encouraging the Government “to continue the generosity displayed so far”, including by ensuring the freedom of movement of all Iraqis fleeing violence.

Despite the very challenging security conditions, the United Nations and partners are delivering essential aid to people who depend on it for survival. However, without urgent and generous contributions from the international community vital supplies and services will have to be cut.

“We urgently need $497 million to provide shelter, food, water and other life-saving services over the coming six months. This is the bare minimum to cover the most basic needs in Iraq. In actuality, the needs are far greater and we wish we could ask for - and receive – the full amount we need,” said Mr. O’Brien.

“It is my job to remind the international community that behind every statistic stands a child, woman or a man. We must not let the people of Iraq down,” he declared.

To this end, just last Thursday, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) joined international partners and agencies in Belgium to launch the 2015 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan in response to critical funding shortages as the conflict in Iraq escalates, with the number of people in need of life-saving assistance over the past year having increased by some 400 per cent.

**Presenting draft proposal, UN envoy urges Libyan parties to ‘heal rift that has torn your country apart’**

9 June - Telling stakeholders in Libya’s dialogue that “mothers across [the country] have their eyes on you,” the United Nations envoy for Libya presented draft political proposal and said that the time had finally come for the parties to take the difficult decision to make peace and begin the process towards national reconciliation.

In his address to the meeting, which opened yesterday in Skhirat, Morocco, Bernardino León, the UN Special Representative for Libya, presented a draft of a proposed political agreement, and said he was “full of hope that this draft represents a fair and reasonable way forward that can guide the country’s democratic and political transition until the adoption of a permanent constitution.”

Mr. Leon urged those attending the meeting “to invoke the necessary spirit of flexibility, tolerance and compromise in order to reach a final agreement.”

He told reporters today that “there is a general sense of hope, I would say even optimism that might produce a triple consensus.”

The draft, Mr. León explained, provides a vision of the interim institutional architecture and security arrangements that will underpin the remainder of the transitional period in Libya. It focuses on providing these institutions with the capacity and tools they need to govern effectively while ensuring they remain bound by democratic principles, the separation of powers, and appropriate checks and balances.

“Key in this undertaking will be an agreement amongst you here gathered today on a government of national accord that is representative of all Libyans, and that can start working quickly to assume its responsibilities in addressing the many difficult challenges facing your country, and working towards stabilising and restoring peace to towns and cities across Libya, beginning with its capital, Tripoli,” Mr. Leon said.
Reminding them that “nothing you do today can ever reverse the terrible pain inflicted on the people of Libya,” he said, “today, mothers across Libya have their eyes on you, praying that your words and actions can bring an end to the suffering they have endured for much of the past year […] having to worry on a daily basis about providing enough food for their children, or making sure they have the right medicines to treat them…”

Mr. León went on to tell the delegates and participants: “It is within your hands, and yours alone, to heal the rift that has divided and torn your country apart, to put it firmly back on the path of democracy […] and resume the difficult process of building a modern, civil State based on the rule of law and respect for human rights.”

He also warned them that “recent terrorist and other attacks by these groups from Derna to al-Qubba, from Sirte to Misrata to Tripoli, to Soukna in the south and elsewhere in the country, should serve as a wake-up call regarding the real danger confronting your country.”

“After five months of long and difficult negotiations,” he said, “the time has now finally come for you to make the even more difficult decision to make peace and begin the process towards national reconciliation.”

Mr. León said “no draft is likely ever to meet all the expectations of different parties in the current Libyan context,” but that he was “confident that the current draft goes a long way towards forging a common ground for a fair and reasonable political agreement that is based on consensus, balance and inclusion, and that can pave the way for a resumption of your country’s democratic process.”

“This is not an agreement of winners or losers, but one in which the only true victors are the people of Libya,” he said.

He also assured the participants that “you will have not only the support of all Libyan stakeholders, but also of the United Nations and the wider international community.”

### Increased militia violence could push Burundi ‘over the edge,’ warns UN rights chief

9 June - Deeply worried at the increasingly violent and threatening actions by a pro-government militia in Burundi, the United Nations human rights chief today urged the national authorities to take immediate and concrete measures to rein them in.

“Every day, we receive 40 to 50 calls from frightened people all across the country pleading for protection or reporting abuses,” High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra‘ad Al Hussein stated in a press release.

His office (OHCHR) has received accounts from 47 Burundian refugees who fled to Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) about serious violations reportedly committed by the militia attached to the pro-government movement known as the Imbonerakure.

“If State authorities are indeed colluding with a violent lawless militia in this manner, they are gambling with the country’s future in the most reckless manner imaginable,” said the High Commissioner, warning that such violations “could tip an already extremely tense situation over the edge.”

“Now, more than ever, it is essential the Burundian authorities show their commitment to peace by clearly disassociating themselves from their violent supporters and ensuring accountability for any crime or human rights violations they may have committed,” he continued.

Reported to have taken place in Bujumbura, as well as in various provinces, the alleged violations include summary executions, abductions, torture, beatings, death threats and other forms of intimidation.

A 19-year-old refugee from Makamba province told OHCHR that his house was attacked and looted at night by
Imbonerakure members and his father stabbed to death because he had refused to join the ruling party, the CNDD-FDD.

Another refugee said he was abducted on 15 April by four members of the militia who accused him of supporting an opposition party, the FNL. He said he was taken to a building and tortured by the four men, who beat him with an iron rod. Wounds were still visible on his body at the time of the interview.

A female refugee from the same town said that she and her husband were also beaten up at night in their house by Imbonerakure elements, who asked why her husband was not taking part in the meetings organised by the CNDD-FDD. Her husband was subsequently abducted and has not been seen or heard from since.

Numerous refugees claimed that threats had been scrawled across the doors and walls of their own or other people’s houses, some being marked with a cross, apparently in order to identify people to be targeted or attacked, or as a means of sowing terror.

“These reports are truly chilling, particularly in a country with a history like Burundi’s,” the human rights chief said. “We have been receiving consistent testimonies indicating that Imbonerakure members operate under instructions from the ruling party and with the support of the national police and intelligence services, which provide them with weapons, vehicles and sometimes uniforms,” he added.

The High Commissioner also called on opposition leaders to rein in any violent elements that may be forming on their side.

“They are so far there have been very few acts of violence committed by opposition elements, there are signs of increasingly coercive efforts to push people into actively supporting the opposition,” he noted. “I urge opposition leaders to make a huge effort to ensure their supporters protest peacefully and do not resort to violence.”

“The last thing Burundi needs after a decade of gradual and largely successful peace-building is to be catapulted back into civil war because of a small number of people’s ruthless determination to retain, or gain, power at any cost,” he stated.

**UN deputy chief urges action to reduce exclusion and discrimination of persons with disabilities**

**9 June** - Empowering persons with disabilities and securing their rights will advance society as a whole, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said today as he urged strengthening global cooperation and partnership on the matter at the Eighth Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The three-day meeting, which opened today at UN Headquarters in New York, aims to take stock of past achievements and looks ahead at strategies for the future. The treaty on persons with disabilities was adopted by the UN General Assembly in April, 2006, following five years of negotiations.

“The Convention of 2006 marked a conceptual shift – from a charity and medical approach to the human rights-based view of disability. This shift will guide us in the right direction going forward,” Mr. Eliasson said today in his opening remarks.

“Our fundamental message then and now is that all human beings are equal and that we constantly have to live up to this assertion of human dignity,” he added as he commended the Convention’s 154 States Parties, and the 86 that have ratified or acceded to its Optional Protocol.

“Similarly, I call on all other countries to join the Convention and carry out its provisions,” the Deputy Secretary-General added.

“We are working to shape an inclusive, accessible and sustainable society for all, guided by a new vision for development for the next 15 years that Member States will adopt in September,” he stated.
The Deputy Secretary-General welcomed the focus on mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities in the post-2015 development agenda, saying that it will help ensure a life of dignity for all.

Mr. Eliasson also encouraged all to work out global indicators that reflect the rights enshrined in the Convention. To that end, data will be crucial to ensuring that persons with disabilities are counted as the world aims to achieve the goals.

“The tragic fact is that persons with disabilities are among the most excluded and isolated in practically all regions of the world. We need urgent action to reduce exclusion, inequality and discrimination,” he said.

It is critical to address the vulnerability of persons with disabilities particularly faced by women and girls, disadvantaged youth, and older persons. The new vision for sustainable development should offer a framework for bold action, benefitting all, he stressed.

“Every country should make the right to inclusive education systems a reality for all students, including boys and girls with disabilities,” Mr. Eliasson emphasized.

He also called attention to the need for full enjoyment of human rights for persons with disabilities in times of disasters, refugee movements and humanitarian emergencies. The results of the Sendai Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction and the ongoing consultations towards the World Humanitarian Summit have underlined that persons with disabilities are disproportionally left behind.

Member States, the public and private sector, UN entities, civil society, in particular organizations of persons with disabilities, should all come together to support the Convention’s implementation.

“We should recall that the quality of a society is ultimately determined by how it deals with and treats its most vulnerable citizens,” the Deputy Secretary-General said.

For its part, the UN Department of Public Information has recently launched a redesigned, interactive website on Accessibility Guidelines for United Nations websites. The site explains all aspects of web accessibility, including content, design and navigation and links to tools that can be used by UN web developers to validate their sites for accessibility.

**FEATURE: UN volunteer in Mali advocates for detainees’ rights**

9 June - When Joseph Agbor Effim arrived in Mali in early 2014, he was deployed to the northern town of Kidal, which had been the scene of clashes between rebels and Government forces. His mission: to participate in efforts to find a lasting solution to the crisis in the country, and particularly to ensure that the rights of detainees are respected.

Mr. Effim, a 37-year-old from Cameroon, served in Kidal as a Judicial Affairs Officer with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). In a town where the justice system had collapsed, he was responsible for monitoring the treatment of detainees and advocating for their rights to be respected.

“I monitored detainee rights violations and the treatment that was given to detainees in all detention facilities,” he said in a phone interview with the UN News Centre. These facilities include those controlled by the police, the gendarmerie and the rebel groups.

Mr. Effim organized sessions with both State interlocutors and members of various rebel groups to encourage them to rebuild the judicial system and to restore the rule of law. He tried to explain the mandate of MINUSMA and to advocate for the respect of international human rights law.

Asked what motivated him to become a UN Volunteer, Mr. Effim, who has several years of experience in judicial affairs, said he wanted to “put his skills at the service of humanity and contribute to peace and development in the fields of justice, human rights and child protection.”
He noted that the environment in Kidal was not easy to deal with but he felt that he could do something “by talking to the rebels and making them understand that even though people are detained, their rights must be protected.” He also tried to impress upon them ‘good practices’ or acceptable standards in relation to detention.

“I tried to create a cordial relationship with these rebel factions and they accepted me,” he added.

Mr. Effim said he was glad that he could bring his experience “to the service of Mali, a nation that had just emerged from conflict.” He also learned a lot in the position in Kidal which enabled him to “experience the challenges of what it takes to work in the field.”

His stay in Kidal lasted only a few months. In May 2014, following clashes between rebels and Malian armed forces, he was redeployed to the capital, Bamako, to a MINUSMA unit responsible for collecting information and statistics on the rule of law in Mali.

For people who are considering becoming a UN Volunteer, Mr. Effim noted that his experience allowed him to, among other things, meet people from different backgrounds. “You increase your ability to deal with people from various parts of the world. You can learn a new language,” he said.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, based in the German city of Bonn, contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. It is active in around 130 countries every year.

UNV’s recent report – The State of the World’s Volunteerism Report 2015 – highlighted the fact that volunteers are playing a vital role in making governments worldwide more accountable and responsive to their citizens.

Mr. Effim plans to stay at least another year in Mali. Then, if his contract is not renewed, he may return to his country. But no matter what, he will continue to “advocate for the rights of people to be protected.”

In Tajikistan, Ban highlights importance of safe water, sanitation and human rights

9 June - Kicking off a high-level event on water in Tajikistan today, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged nations in the region and beyond to renew their commitment to safe water and sanitation as the international community forges ahead with the post-2015 development agenda and climate change intensifies the need to act.

“Access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene represent some of the highest development priorities of countries worldwide. These are also important human rights issues,” Mr. Ban said in his opening remarks at the Dushanbe conference.

“Water is life. Water is health. Water is dignity. Water is a human right,” he emphasized.

The water challenge garners most attention at the extremes – in times of drought or flood. But humanity cannot forget that water is essential every day and in almost every way for basic development activities. Bringing people together around a precious resource opens the door to bringing them together around wider issues of peace and security, the UN chief also said.

Today’s meeting takes stock of progress made during the International Decade of Water for Life (2005-2015), initiated by Tajikistan to raise awareness and galvanize action around access to safe water. And over the past ten years much has been achieved, Mr. Ban said. The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target for safe and sustainable drinking water was realized five years ahead of schedule. In the course of one generation, 2.3 billion people have gained access to drinking water and more than 1.9 billion people gained access to sanitation.

However, some 2.5 billion people lack access to adequate sanitation and another billion still practice open defecation. Nearly 1,000 children under the age of five are killed each day by a toxic mix of unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation and
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hygiene. And the United Nations estimates that ten years from now, 1.8 billion people will live in areas with absolute water scarcity, and two out of three people around the world could live under water stress conditions.

On a regional level, Mr. Ban said it was crucial to reach consensus over the management of trans-boundary water resources in Central Asia. Further ratification by countries of Central Asia of the water conventions will create a solid framework for this.

Water’s place in the Sustainable Development Goals go well beyond access – taking into account critical issues such as integrated water resources management, efficiency of use, water quality, transboundary cooperation, water-related ecosystems, and water-related disasters, he said.

Mr. Ban pointed out that the burden of gathering drinking water falls largely on women and girls. They spend 200 million hours every day collecting it. Inadequate sanitation facilities also affect the education, economic productivity, dignity and personal safety of women and girls.

“As we forge ahead with the post-2015 development agenda, it is crucial to involve women in decision making at all levels to ensure access and sustainable management of water and sanitation,” the UN chief emphasized.

Later in the day at a press conference with President Rahmon, the Secretary-General drew attention to his remarks to the ‘Water for Life’ conference and also highlighted, what he referred to as ‘the vital issue of human rights’ and underscored support for the Government’s continued engagement with the UN on human rights mechanisms – particularly to address key human rights challenges.

“Increasing national coordination mechanisms and implementing UN human rights recommendations holistically and in cooperation with civil society will be important as Tajikistan’s prepares for the second round of the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review,” he said, adding that adoption of a comprehensive national human rights action plan could streamline these efforts.

In addition, he expressed gratitude for the Government’s support to humanitarian efforts and for hosting the World Humanitarian Summit regional consultations for Central and South Asia in Dushanbe next month.

In Washington, UN health agency and partners convene summit on improving health data

9 June - With more than two-thirds of the world’s population living in countries that do not produce reliable statistics on mortality by age, sex and cause of death, the World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners are leading an international collaboration in measurement and accountability for global public health over the next 15 years.

“Accurate and timely health data are the foundation to improving public health. Without reliable information to set priorities and measure results, countries and their development partners are working in the dark,” WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan told the Measurement and Accountability for Results in Health Summit, meeting from today through 11 June in Washington, D.C.

WHO, together with the World Bank and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), is leading the international collaboration to improve support for countries to have strong health information systems.

At the summit, dozens of global health leaders from governments, multilaterals, academia, research institutions and civil society will endorse The Roadmap for Health Measurement and Accountability and a 5-Point Call to Action, which outline a shared strategic approach and priority actions and targets that countries and development partners can use to put effective health monitoring plans in place.
Jim Yong Kim, President of the World Bank Group, said: “Today’s investments in country health information systems will lead to a better tomorrow for billions of people.”

Also today, WHO and partners launched the Global Reference List of 100 Core Health Indicators to improve measurement and accountability for global public health.

The aim of the list, according to WHO, is to reduce excessive and duplicative reporting requirements that currently burden countries and improve harmonization, and serve as “a global standard for health data collection in countries and align global health partners.”

In her address to the health summit, Dr. Chan referred to the “post-2015 development agenda” and its emphasis on transparency, accountability, and measurable results is increasing every day.

“But measurement and accountability depend on data that simply do not exist in the countries we are serving,” she said. “Over 100 countries, representing more than two-thirds of the world’s population, do not have systems for civil registration and vital statistics that produce reliable data on causes of death.”

“Without these data, countries and their development partners are working in the dark, throwing money into a black hole,” she warned.

Dr. Ties Boerma, WHO Director of the Department of Health Statistics and Information Systems, elaborated further on the global commitment to improve data by saying that targets include countries having electronic systems in at least 80 per cent of health facilities for real-time reporting of health statistics by 2025.

Dr. Boerma also said that “by 2030, all births worldwide should be recorded in a civil registration system, and all hospitals should use the WHO standard ICD (International Classification of Disease) to report the cause of every death in their facility.”

Panellists at the Summit will discuss issues related to building country capacity and demand for health data, including topics such as data revolution and the importance of country and global accountability.

**As presidential poll approaches, Côte d’Ivoire will continue to need UN support, Security Council told**

9 June - For Côte d’Ivoire, the October presidential election represents an important milestone in the consolidation of the hard-won gains of recent years, the United Nations envoy for the West African country today told the Security Council today, outlining a very different environment from 2010, but nevertheless advocating for a continued UN presence there.

“Much has been accomplished since the last election, which was marred by terrible violence. Stability is being progressively maintained. The economy is growing, and Ivorians are able to pursue their affairs in a peaceful environment. While political disagreements remain, there is more and more national consensus for constructive dialogue,” explained Aïchatou Mindaoudou, who heads the UN Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI).

Indeed, following the 29 January talks, concrete measures were taken to fund, on an exceptional basis, opposition political parties that do not hold a seat in the National Assembly, she noted.

Dialogue resumed on 26 May, Ms. Mindaoudou continued, bringing together 16 opposition political parties that were focused on crucial issues. UNOCI has also been informed that meetings between the Government and the opposition will be held on a monthly basis. Such advances in political dialogue have contributed significantly to improvements in the overall security and stability of Côte d’Ivoire, she acknowledged.
“However, there are still some political stakeholders who have given in to the temptation to use inflammatory rhetoric, who must continually be encouraged to act responsibly, and in accordance with the law, throughout the electoral period,” observed the Special Representative, who regretted the “political posturing” of some “hardliners.”

But if the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) party and the Parti Démocratique de Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI) are currently experiencing dissidence among their numbers, plural political views and positions are generally being expressed peacefully, according to her.

“In my recent visit of western Côte d’Ivoire, I heard from local stakeholders their genuine commitment to peaceful elections, and the recognition that electoral violence would have negative consequences for the region,” underlined Ms. Mindaoudou.

In preparation for the election, the amended Electoral Code was adopted on 2 April, she reported. Voter registration will go from June 1 to 30 in over 2,000 centres, with the final voters list expected to be ready by 31 August.

June 30 has also been set as the deadline for completing the process of some 64,000 former combatants. “Support will be needed beyond the closure of the programme, as a significant number of them will still be undergoing the reinsertion process, which is expected to last into early 2016.”

Finally, June 30 is also the date of expiration of UNOCI’s mandate, which the Security Council should renew at this “critical juncture” to consolidate Côte d’Ivoire’s achievements since the 2010 post-election crisis, stated Ms. Mindaoudou.

Despite a number of improvements in the security sector, the UNOCI chief indeed expressed concerns at the lack of equipment among Ivorian law enforcement and security institutions for the maintenance of public order, “which poses a major challenge to their operational capabilities to ensure democratic crowd control.”

Despite the fact that there is an “overall downward trend in criminal activities” since January 2015, armed robberies and banditry continue to pose a challenge for the country, noted the Special Representative.

“The way cities are planned, run and managed is crucial for development – UN deputy chief

9 June - In his address to the World Cities Summit in New York today, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson called on global leaders to best adapt to the demographic and cultural shift that is taking place in cities worldwide in order to make them economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially vibrant.

“Urbanization can be a transformative force for the sustainable development goals by making cities and human settlements safe, resilient and sustainable,” Mr. Eliasson said in his opening remarks to city mayors gathered at the Summit whose main theme this year focuses on innovation.

In 2050, around 70 per cent of the world’s population will live in urban areas. Cities are where 80 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) is generated. Cities also account for just over half of global greenhouse gas emissions and 75 per cent of global energy consumption.

Close to one billion of the world’s urban dwellers still live in dire, even life-threatening, slum conditions – this figure is projected to rise to 1.6 billion by 2030. Some 2.5 billion people in the world lack access to improved sanitation, not least in urban areas.

“Rising inequality is today a universal concern and very much a reality in cities. Poverty is increasingly concentrated in
urban areas,” Mr. Eliasson said.

There are also growing difficulties in integrating migrants, creating ethnically and socially fragmented areas of cities. Insensitive planning and inaccessible infrastructure and public services also build barriers which prevent women, persons with disabilities and senior citizens from benefitting from urban development.

“If cities join forces with governments, the private sector, civil society and urban planners, they can become the hubs for climate and development solutions,” Mr. Eliasson said, emphasising that well-planned and well-managed cities reduce poverty, protect citizens from climate impacts and stimulate sustainable economic growth.

But there is no one-size-fits-all approach. And that is why it is important for countries and cities to develop urban policies that capture their own unique circumstances and aspirations.

On sustainable urban planning and design, the Deputy Secretary-General said that human rights and the rule of law, not least strong institutions, must be promoted and protected. Equitable urban development and inclusive growth must be ensured. Civil society and democratic participation must be expanded. Environmental sustainability must be pursued.

Mayors will continue to play a critical role in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and the Paris climate change agreement, when global goals will need to be integrated into local realities and communicated to local communities.

**Uganda: UN-backed investments in small farmers yield impressive outcomes**

9 June - Smallholder farmers in Uganda have made impressive progress in grain harvest and storage, thanks to a World Food Programme (WFP) investment plan which aims at improving their agricultural practices and market access.

“WFP is providing over 1,000 farmer groups with critical information, skills and modern tools which enable them to access the quality grain market,” Michael Dunford, WFP’s acting country representative, said yesterday in a news release.

Agriculture and market support, he highlighted, are among WFP’s priorities in Uganda, complementing Government initiatives to improve grain harvest.

However, inadequate storage and handling practices reduce the quality of the grain, which blocks access to formal markets, explained Mr. Dunford.

“By building warehouses and establishing local storage facilities, WFP has increased grain storage capacity in Uganda by more than 25,000 metric tons and helped to stimulate trading,” he added.

In infrastructure, WFP and partners have been working with farmers to upgrade storage facilities and provide modern grain processing equipment to ensure their access to markets.

In addition, the UN agency trained over 16,000 farmers in 27 districts, as well as purchased 62,000 pieces of grain storage equipment for households in 2014.

Farmers therefore have been selling grains at a much competitive price. Last year, for example, WFP bought over 41,000 metric tons of food at $17.5 million, from small scale farmers as well as grain traders throughout Uganda.

WFP has been working with partners such as the National Agriculture Policy and objectives of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The United States has funded more than 60 per cent of WFP’s investment in Uganda over the last six years, with critical support from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Germany, Japan and
the UN Peacebuilding Fund.

Since 2009, WFP has invested over $32 million in infrastructure and training to assist small farmer groups in Uganda.

**At UN-backed forum, Africa’s least developed countries pledge to transform their economies**

9 June - Voicing determination to transform the structure of their economies and graduate from their status as some of the world’s poorest nations, Ministers from the least developed countries (LDCs) in Africa at a United Nations-supported meeting in Milan have pledged to draw on their countries’ great potential to boost growth and lock in sustainable development.

At a Ministerial Meeting co-organized by the Government of Italy and the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), high-level participants discussed ways in which inclusive economic growth can be accelerated, thus contributing to sustainable development.

Government representatives from 29 countries as well as experts, including from the United Nations system and other international organizations, think tanks and the private sector, stressed the key drivers of “graduation” from the LDC category. This included enhancing capacity to produce products and services, the importance of good governance, food security, access to modern energy and infrastructure development.

The meeting was held on the margins of the Expo Milano 2015, the universal exhibition that Italy is hosting from May to October 2015 on the theme *Feeding the Planet – Energy for Life*.

In a Ministerial declaration participants stressed that least developed countries (LDCs) must be prioritized in the upcoming Third International Conference on Financing for Development Conference, to be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and at the UN special summit in September on the post-2015 development agenda.

In the declaration, they underscored that it is essential that commitments to overseas development assistance are met, in addition to enhancing investment promotion, market access and access to technology. For development to be rapid and sustainable, they also stressed stronger national ownership and leadership.

“We must ensure sufficient resources to facilitate needed infrastructure development to foster resilient communities and empower poor and marginalized rural households for inclusive and sustainable development in the LDCs,” said High Representative for Least Developed Countries, LLDCs and Small Island Developing States, Gyan Chandra Acharya.

“There is great potential in these countries,” he continued, stressing that transformation in LDCs will not only help eradicate poverty and hunger, but can ensure that they can be important contributors to food security and global peace and prosperity.

“There is a great global premium on sustainable development of LDCs. It promotes international peace, prosperity and order.”

Ministers highlighted the importance of graduation from the LDC category in line with the overarching goal of the 2011 Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) for the LDCs, which calls for at least half of those countries to meet the criteria for graduation from the category by 2020.

The IPoA is an ambitious set of targets which is due to be reviewed at a mid-term meeting next year. It was emphasized that graduation from the LDC category is a major milestone, which should lead them back towards broad-based growth, human development and better resilience.

Least Developed Countries represent the poorest and weakest segment of the international community. They comprise more
than 880 million people (about 12 per cent of world’s population), but account for less than 2 per cent of the world’s gross domestic product (GDP) and about 1 per cent of global trade in goods.

The LDC category was officially established in 1971 by the UN General Assembly with a view to attracting special international support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the UN family. Since then, only 4 countries have graduated from the category.

However, recent progress with respect to economic and social indicators in a number of countries around the world has enabled more LDCs to reach the thresholds for graduation.

**Ban welcomes 'milestone' agreement on new Nepal constitution**

9 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the agreement of a new constitution for Nepal as “a major milestone” in the country's democratic development, a spokesperson for the United Nations confirmed today.

In a statement issued this afternoon, the spokesperson said Mr. Ban applauded the “diligent effort and constructive leadership” demonstrated by Nepal's political leaders in reaching the agreement on 8 June amid the country's wider reconstruction efforts following the devastating earthquakes of April and May.

“The Secretary-General encourages all political leaders to take decisive steps to implement the agreement, work on remaining issues and complete the constitution drafting process through inclusive consultation in the broad interest of the Nepali people,” continued the statement.

“This achievement is particularly laudable as it was reached amid challenging circumstances caused by the major earthquakes of April and May.”

In addition, the UN spokesperson reiterated the Secretary-General's ongoing commitment to Nepal's peace process and its reconstruction while also reaffirming the Organization's continuing support for the country.

The 25 April earthquake, and its 7.3 magnitude follow-up on 12 May, damaged 26 of Nepal's hospitals and over 1,100 health facilities while affecting some 5.6 million people, half of whom have been displaced. An estimated 8,500 people were killed by the two quakes.

Moreover, the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has confirmed that 8.1 million people are in need of humanitarian support while another 1.9 million require food assistance.

**As refugees flood Greek island, UN agency warns of strained resources**

9 June - The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) is reporting the arrival of record numbers of refugees on the Greek island of Lesvos, severely straining local reception capacities and the island’s limited resources.

At a press briefing held earlier today in Geneva, UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards warned that sea arrivals in the eastern Aegean islands of Greece have been averaging some 600 people a day with half of the total number coming ashore in Lesvos. He added that the arrivals in Lesvos – the bulk of which originate from countries like Syria, Afghanistan Iraq and Turkey – had shot up from 737 in January to 7,200 in May – nearly a 1,000 per cent spike.

The increasingly heavy influx has caused a particular strain on the island’s reception and processing points which are now
beyond capacity, continued Mr. Edwards. A screening centre in the village of Moria, for example, was currently housing over a thousand refugees – more than twice its official capacity of 410 people – while an education park in Kara Tepe was being used as temporary accommodation for another 1,000 refugees.

The spokesperson’s announcement comes just days after UNHCR said it would respond to the critical situation in the Greek islands by increasing its personnel in Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Kos, Rhodes, Leros and Evros.

The UN agency is already helping local authorities to improve reception conditions, identify additional accommodation for refugees, provide legal information and counselling to new arrivals and distribute sleeping bags and mats, soap, sanitary towels and other relief items to the most needy.

However, as regards Lesvos, UNHCR is now calling for an additional urgent reinforcement of personnel and resources as well as a boost in support for the affected island communities in order to effectively deal with the challenges posed by the large number of arrivals, Mr. Edwards added.

More than 90 per cent of the people arriving in the Greek islands are from refugee-producing countries, principally Syria from where over 60 per cent of people came this year, followed by Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Eritrea.

As of the end of May, almost 90,000 refugees and migrants had crossed the Mediterranean in 2015, including some 46,500 who landed in Italy and the 42,000 in Greece. Smaller arrivals numbers have been recorded in Spain at 920 and Malta at 91, according to UNHCR, which also reported that 1,850 refugees or migrants have died or are missing at sea.

UN-backed fund reaches $30 million target to compensate victims of Bangladesh factory collapse

9 June - Set up in October 2013 with assistance from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Rana Plaza Coordination Committee has announced that it met its $30 million target so that it can pay out full compensation to the victims and families of a deadly factory collapse in Bangladesh that claimed more than 1,100 lives and left scores of others injured.

Representing all industry stakeholders, the Committee estimated that $30 million was required to ensure fair and equitable compensation, according to ILO Conventions, to all victims of the 2013 tragedy. Full payments are expected to be made in the coming weeks to cover the victims’ income loss and medical costs.

In a press statement, ILO Director-General Guy Ryder said he is encouraged by the achievement but that more work must be done; “this is a milestone, but we still have important business to deal with. We must now work together to ensure that accidents can be prevented in the future.”

By April 2015 – the second anniversary of the Rana Plaza accident – in excess of $27M had been raised and the Committee had paid out 70 per cent of the awards promised to more than 2,800 claimants. Further donations, including one significant sum pledged late last week, tipped the scale to meet the $30 million goal, so that all final payments be made.

As chair of the Rana Plaza Coordination Committee, ILO has supported the design of one harmonized arrangement for all of the accident victims. In January 2014, the ILO established the Rana Plaza Donors Trust Fund to bolster the Committee’s effort to finance the programme.

The action taken by the Bangladesh Government, the country’s employers, workers, international brands, trade unions and non-governmental organizations on the Committee have ensured that fair compensation can now be awarded.

Although Bangladesh does not currently have a national employment injury insurance system to protect accident victims at work, ILO is engaging with the Government; employers’ and workers’ organizations; donors; and industry partners to establish one.
Mr. Ryder affirmed the importance that “a robust national employment injury insurance scheme is established so that victims of any future accidents will be swiftly and justly compensated and cared for.”

In this context, the full implementation of the Rana Plaza Arrangement within a two year period will represent a very significant step forward.

**Ukraine: UN reports uptick in internal displacement as country’s conflict grinds on**

9 June - The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine has soared to over one million due to the ongoing conflict in the country’s eastern regions, the United Nations humanitarian office reported today.

Addressing a press briefing held earlier this morning in Geneva, Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told reporters that during the 15-month span between April 2014 and June 2015, the Ukraine crisis triggered the internal displacement of more than 1.3 million people, mostly across the country’s eastern provinces of Dnetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkivska. This, he added, placed the Eastern European country among the top 10 countries in the world for internal displacement.

In addition to the growing numbers of displaced, on-the-ground casualties are also increasing, warned Mr. Laerke. According to OCHA’s conservative estimates, at least 6,454 people, both military and civilians, have been killed, and another 16,146 have been wounded since the outbreak of hostilities.

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine transcended what was initially seen as an internal Ukrainian political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country, later reaching full-scale conflict in the east. Nevertheless, despite a September 2014 cease-fire agreed in Minsk, the fighting has since continuously deteriorated, with serious consequences for the country’s unity, territorial integrity and stability. In February 2015, the parties in Ukraine and the Trilateral Contact Group signed a “Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements.”

One particular recent bout of fighting in the town of Marinka had led to a critical deterioration in humanitarian needs and a lack of access to water, the OCHA spokesperson continued. He said an estimated 10,000 people remaining in the Marinka area had no access to water for the past days and were being reached by insufficient supplies. Meanwhile, in the non-Government controlled areas of Luhansk province, thousands of people were reportedly without any access to water at all.

Overall, Mr. Laerke concluded, an estimated 5 million people across Ukraine remained in need of humanitarian aid. Although the UN-backed humanitarian response plan is targeting 3.2 million of those in need, he cautioned that the plan is currently experiencing a shortfall in funding with only 24 per cent of it covered.