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UN and regional leaders launch effort to put Ebola-affected West Africa on path to recovery

10 July - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today focused world attention on the “final stretch” of the response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, an epidemic that has killed more than 11,000 people, saying: “let us collectively take a deep breath and resolve to finish the job” and put the most affected countries on the path of recovery.

“Your continued generosity will help the affected countries carry out their plans for recovery over the next two years,” said Mr. Ban in his opening remarks at the International Conference on Ebola Recovery being held at UN Headquarters in New York.

Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, speaking on behalf of Guinea, Sierra Leone and her own country, those hardest hit by last year's unprecedented outbreak, said that the funding gap for the three countries' national recover plans and the regional Mano River Union plan is estimated at $7.2 billion, which includes $4 billion for the region as a whole.

“There is no doubt that the resources required are significant,” Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf said. “We believe however that this can be achieved through existing bilateral and multilateral commitments supplemented by the allocation of additional resources.”

“Is this asking too much?” she said.

“We say no because, a strong Mano River Union can be a formidable force for recovery and resilience in the sub-region; a productive, progressive and peaceful Mano River Union which would result from your support will attract private sector
investment and capital in our natural resource with ensuring sustainability in our effort and positive impact on regional stability and world trade,” she said.

Warning that Ebola is “a stubborn enemy,” the President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma said “sometimes, humanity shows a very short attention-span and wants to move on” and he emphasized: “No, no, no, this fight isn't over.”

Guinean President Alpha Conde spotlighted the breadth of socio-economic damage caused by the outbreak noting that health systems collapsed, investors and consultants have left the three countries, farms and markets had ceased to function, the trade and travel to and from the region had been compromised, tax revenues declined, and household incomes had been hard hit.

While cases in Guinea and Sierra Leone have been reduced considerably, Mr. Ban and other speakers said new cases in Liberia show the need for continued vigilance given the regional risks.

Liberia was mid-way through a 90-day period of heightened surveillance and vigilance, following the completion of 42 days since the burial of the last person infected with Ebola virus disease when the disease resurfaced last month.

The all-day conference is chaired by UN Development Program Administrator Helen Clark and was convened by the UN Secretary-General in partnership with the African Union, European Union, the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

“We must not let up until we end this deadly epidemic,” declared World Bank President Jim Kim, who urged ongoing efforts to help affected countries get to – and sustain zero cases.

Mr. Ban said the outbreak has eroded progress on peace and development, disrupted health and social services, and affected major economic sectors such as agriculture, mining, trade, tourism, transport, fisheries and livestock. The functioning of schools, hospitals and other public infrastructure has suffered.

“This negative impact – on economies, livelihoods and more importantly lives – demands that the global community continues to prioritize recovery from Ebola even long after the crisis subsides,” he said.

“The strategy to end the outbreak is working – but the final stretch of the response remains particularly challenging,” he said. “That is why today is about more than speeches and pledges – it is a chance to forge a partnership for a better future – a future that is full of opportunity and free of Ebola.”

As a follow-up to today's event, the African Union will convene an International Conference on Africa's Fight against Ebola later this month in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea.

**Ahead of Yemen ceasefire, UNICEF sounds alarm about impact of crisis on children**

10 July - Yemen's humanitarian crisis has reached a new low amid disintegrating health services and the spread of infectious disease among children, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) confirmed today just hours before a ceasefire aimed at facilitating the delivery of critical relief is slated to begin.

Speaking to reporters earlier this afternoon in Geneva, UNICEF spokesperson Christophe Boulierac explained that the UN agency and its partners were stepping up a series of initiatives targeting Yemen's struggling children, including nutrition screening, vaccinations and other life-saving interventions.

In the southern city of Aden, for instance, UNICEF had supplied emergency ambulances, as well as blood testing and transfusion services to ensure that injured children could receive immediate treatment.
Mr. Boulierac added that the UNICEF team in Aden was also currently supporting an immunization campaign as part of a nation-wide drive aimed at vaccinating around one million children under the age of one against measles, polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

“Our mobile teams and staff have to brave extremely hazardous conditions, risking their lives to reach children and women wherever they can. If they don't do that more children are likely to die from malnutrition and preventable diseases,” Julien Harneis, UNICEF Representative in Yemen said in a press release.

“But what Yemen really needs now is a return to peace, a solution to the fuel and power crisis and restoration of regular health services”, Mr. Harneis added.

According to the latest UN data, the humanitarian crisis in Yemen has been steadily deteriorating since the outbreak of fighting in late March 2015.

In the past three months alone, some 3,000 Yemenis have been killed, half of them civilians, and 14,000 others injured. Over a million people have had to flee their homes and 21 million need immediate help, close to 13 million people are unable to meet their food needs, 15 million people have no healthcare and outbreaks of dengue and malaria are raging unchecked.

Humanitarian partners have reached 4.4 million people with aid in the past three months, but this is a fraction of those in need, says the UN Spokesperson's office. The United Nations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and international non-governmental organizations working together have now activated the highest level of emergency response.

At the same time, just yesterday, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the beginning of a humanitarian pause on Friday, 10 July, to permit humanitarian actors to reach civilians in need.

Today, the UN Security Council welcomed the announcement and emphasized that all parties would need to suspend military operations during the pause and that no party should take advantage of the pause to move weapons or seize territory.

Further, the Council urged all parties to facilitate the urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance to all parts of Yemen, as well as rapid, safe, and unhindered access for humanitarian actors to reach people in need of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance.

The announcement of the pause comes at a critical moment for Yemen's children, according to the UNICEF spokesperson who reported that more than 2.5 million children were at risk of diarrhoeal diseases, half a million were at risk of severe acute malnutrition, more than 1.3 million children faced the threat of acute respiratory tract infections and 2.6 million of them under the age of 15 were not protected against measles.

To that point, Mr. Boulierac reiterated the UN's call all parties to enable the urgent delivery of food, water and medical attention to the most vulnerable populations in Yemen during the pause.

Also addressing the briefing was World Food Programme (WFP) spokesperson, Elisabeth Byrs, who cited the agency's efforts over the past months in reaching close to 2 million people with emergency food aid.

Nevertheless, she added, numerous obstacles continued to impede the UN agency's access to vulnerable populations including damaged roads and multiple checkpoints.
Combining social protection with pro-poor investments can eradicate world hunger by 2030 – UN

10 July - According to a new joint United Nations agency report, an additional $160 per year for each person living in extreme poverty would end chronic hunger – and additional investments of an estimated $267 billion annually in social protection and in rural and urban areas would sustainably eradicate world hunger by 2030.

The report, prepared by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), was presented in Rome today – ahead of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which will be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 13 to 16 July 2015.

The report, Achieving Zero Hunger notes that despite decades of progress, nearly 800 million people, mostly in rural areas, still lacked enough to eat – while underscoring that, on average, $160 annually would enable them access to food and improved livelihoods.

Eliminating chronic undernourishment by 2030 is a key element of the second proposed sustainable development goal of the new post-2015 agenda, which will be up for adoption at the UN General Assembly in September. It is also at the heart of the Zero Hunger Challenge supported by the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva said the message of the report was clear: “If we adopt a 'business as usual' approach, by 2030, we would still have more than 650 million people suffering from hunger,” which is “why we are championing an approach that combines social protection with additional targeted investments in rural development, agriculture and urban areas that will chiefly benefit the poor.”

Noting that a total investment of some $267 billion per year over the next 15 years would eradicate world hunger, Mr. Graziano da Silva stressed, “given that this is more or less equivalent to 0.3 per cent of the global GDP, I personally think it is a relatively small price to pay to end hunger.”

“We won't see gains in reducing poverty and hunger unless we seriously invest in rural people,” said IFAD President Kanayo F. Nwanze. “Given the right kind of tools and resources, small-scale agricultural producers and rural entrepreneurs can transform struggling communities into thriving places.”

“We need a dramatic shift in thinking to help the world’s poorest break the cycle of hunger and poverty by 2030. We cannot allow them to be left behind,” said WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin. “We must invest in the most vulnerable and ensure that they have the tools they need not only to overcome hunger, but to enhance their resources and capabilities.”

The report noted how the international community needs to build on the successful experiences of the countries that combined investment and social protection to combat hunger and poverty in rural and urban areas.

The chiefs of FAO, IFAD and WFP, the UN's Rome-based agencies, accompanied the report with an advocacy note, saying that the Financing for Development Conference sought to ensure all nations, especially developing countries, with the means to achieve their development objectives – including the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

According to the report, a “business as usual” approach would still leave some 650 million people hungry in 2030. Conversely, a combined social protection and investment scenario using public funded transfers would lift people out of chronic hunger by ensuring that they earn $1.25 a day, which corresponds to the World Bank-determined poverty line level.

The social protection measure would cost an additional $116 billion per year, $75 billion for rural and $41 billion for urban areas. Some $151 billion in additional pro-poor investments – $105 billion for rural development and agriculture and $46 billion for urban areas – would also be required to stimulate income generation for those living in poverty. The combination
of social protection and investments would bring the total to $267 billion.

While most of the investment would come from the private sector – especially farmers – it would need to be complemented by additional public sector investments in rural infrastructure, transport, health and education.

**With some 1,000 refugees arriving daily, Greek islands under 'severe strain,' warns UN agency**

10 July - Close to 1,000 refugees are now arriving on the Greek islands every day, creating an unprecedented emergency for Greece and other countries, the UN refugee agency warned on Friday.

“Greece's volatile economic situation, combined with the increasing numbers of new arrivals, is putting severe strain on small island communities, which lack the basic infrastructure and services to adequately respond to the growing humanitarian needs,” William Spindler, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said during a press briefing in Geneva.

Since the beginning of the year, a “staggering” 77,100 people had arrived in Greece by sea, many on flimsy and unsafe vessels. Almost 60 per cent of the new arrivals are from Syria while others come from Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea and Somalia.

A boat leaving Turkey on Tuesday loaded with up to 40 refugees capsized between the Greek islands of Agathonisi and Farmakonisi, said Mr. Spindler. Authorities say 19 people were rescued, but five bodies were retrieved and up to 16 people are still missing.

UNHCR said that the number of people arriving is now so high that, despite all efforts, the authorities and local communities can no longer cope.

A majority of the refugees arriving in Greece are moving onward, trying to reach countries in western and northern Europe through the western Balkans region.

Countries in this region such as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia, have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of refugees. In the first half of this year, some 45,000 people sought asylum in the region, almost a ninefold increase of asylum applications compared with the same period in 2014.

However, these are only some of the refugees entering the two countries, with most continuing directly on their way to Hungary and further north. It is estimated that half of all refugees who are actually passing through the region do so without being registered by the authorities, and are exposed to violence and abuse by smugglers and criminal gangs.

“An urgent response from Europe is needed before the situation deteriorates further,” Mr. Spindler stressed. “Tightening borders is not the solution, including the plans of the Hungarian government to build a fence along the Serbian border.”

Expressing concerns for the well-being of refugees, including pregnant women and children, the spokesperson stressed that, despite the precarious situation facing the livelihoods of many Greek people, their response towards refugees has for the most part been “welcoming and generous.”

In the face of such situation, more UNHCR staffers have already been deployed to five locations in the eastern Aegean, to provide advice and assistance to new arrivals and care for unaccompanied children and people with specific needs.
Burundi: UN rights office warns about consequences of country's 'extremely tense' situation

10 July - One day after United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein alerted the Security Council about the seriousness of the electoral crisis in Burundi, his Office today issued a new warning about the impact the “extremely tense situation” there could have on the stability and the development of Central Africa.

Indeed, more than 145,000 people have already fled to neighboring countries less than a week before the presidential election, set for July 15, and ten days after parliamentary and local elections, which took place in an atmosphere far from conducive to a free, fair and inclusive vote, explained the Spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Rupert Colville, during a press conference in Geneva.

“Polls were boycotted by opposition parties, with outbreaks of violence, including small-arms and grenade attacks,” he stressed.

Over the past two months, UNHCR office in Burundi has documented over 300 cases of arbitrary arrest and detention of demonstrators, human rights defenders, political opponents and journalists. Numerous cases of torture and other forms of ill-treatment in detention were also reported.

“A severe crackdown on independent media has led to the closure of most private media and radio stations. Large numbers of journalists and human rights defenders have fled Burundi for fear of reprisals. Peaceful protests have been met with unwarranted use of force, including lethal force, in violation of Burundi’s obligation under national and international law to guarantee the right to freedom of assembly,” Mr. Colville continued.

Recently, key members of the Pierre Nkurunziza's own political party and government have fled the country, the Spokesperson added.

“Our field office has also documented dozens of killings, most of them shootings of demonstrators and human rights defenders by members of the Imbonerakure militia and security forces,” he said, urging the authorities to disarm this militia without delay.

Refugees interviewed by our staff in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Tanzania continue to refer to the Imbonerakure as the main threat, but some have also stated that militants from other groups are also employing violence – a new and disturbing development.

“Media interviews carried out in the past couple of days, with leaders of the attempted coup in May, who talk openly of organizing military units and of resorting to the use of force, are alarming. We call on all sides to make serious and urgent efforts to find a peaceful solution to this crisis before it leads to uncontrollable violence,” concluded Mr. Colville.
Marking World Day, UN spotlights plight of vulnerable populations in emergencies

10 July - The United Nations plans to raise awareness of the needs of women and girls in emergencies on World Population Day 2015 with campaigns including an outdoor event in the Kazakh capital of Almaty and a panel discussion in the Thai capital of Bangkok on this year's theme 'vulnerable populations in emergencies.'

“Not since the end of the Second World War have so many people been forced from their homes across the planet,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his message on the Day, which is observed on July 11 as a day to focus attention on the urgency and importance of population issues.

“With nearly 60 million individuals having fled conflict or disaster, women and adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable,” Mr. Ban said. “Violent extremists and armed groups are committing terrible abuses that result in trauma, unintended pregnancy and infection with HIV and other diseases. Shame and accountability rest squarely on the shoulders of the perpetrators who wage cowardly battles across the bodies of innocents.”

“We must staunchly protect women's health, including their sexual and reproductive health, and address their needs as a priority in emergency relief operations,” he said. “At the same time, we must continuously advance women's human rights in times of both turmoil and calm in order to enable them to help avert conflict, stand strong should it strike, and foster the healing that is so badly needed in war-torn societies.”

Noting that “as the United Nations marks its 70th anniversary this year,” the UN chief urged countries “to commit to bold results that will make 2015 a time of global action, putting people first so that they help build resilience, peace and sustainable prosperity for generations to come.”

The Executive Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Babatunde Osotemehin, in his message, said that one of the priorities of his agency is to empower and safeguard the well-being of women, adolescent girls, and young people and address their specific needs and concerns.

As part of its emergency response, “UNFPA deploys hygiene kits, obstetric and contraceptive supplies, trained personnel and other support to vulnerable populations,” Mr. Osotemehin said. “It also works to ensure the needs of women, adolescent girls and young people are served through both an emergency and the reconstruction phase.”

“On this World Population Day, we call on the international community to redouble efforts to protect the health and rights of women and girls,” he said.

As part of its outreach efforts to raise awareness this year, UNFPA has started a conversation on Twitter with the hashtag #WPD2015, and on Saturday plans to hold a panel discussion in Bangkok on meeting on the needs of vulnerable people in humanitarian crises and in Kazakhstan, a festival convened with Hard Rock Cafe Almaty, Red Crescent Society and Department of Emergency of Almaty, will include flash mobs, information sessions on responsible behaviours in emergencies, trainings on emergency assistance, and theatrical performances by youth organizations.
UN experts report uptick in flow of Tunisian militants to conflict zones, call for urgent response

10 July - The number of Tunisian militants flocking to join the hostilities in Syria and Iraq is one of the highest among those traveling to fight alongside extremists in the Middle East's two most dogged conflicts, the United Nations Working Group on the use of mercenaries confirmed today.

“Sophisticated travel networks operate to take recruits across the porous borders, and sometimes through areas where trafficking in people and illicit goods may not be effectively controlled,” Elzbieta Karska, the Working Group's chairperson, said in a press release. “Testimony has documented that the routes taken entail travel through Libya, then Turkey and its border at Antakya, and then Syria.”

The motivational factors pushing Tunisian fighters into the arms of extremist and so-called takfiri groups are as varied as they are numerous. According to the UN experts, some are prompted by religious and political ideologies while others are lured by financial gains, a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging.

In addition, the majority of the Tunisians traveling abroad appear to be young and fall within the 18 to 35 demographic range but include both men and women alike. To that point, recruiters of militants are also well-compensated for their efforts.

“We were told repeatedly that many foreign fighters undertake training in Libya before going to Syria, and that the instability in Libya has fuelled a lot of the support activities for the growth, training, and travel for foreign fighters,” Ms. Karska continued. “Resolution of the conflict and political impasse in that country would thus benefit Tunisia's counter-terrorism efforts considerably.”

The new information is the result of an eight-day fact-finding mission to the North African country in which Ms. Karska and her Working Group colleagues – Chile's Patricia Arias, South Africa's Anton Katz, the United States' Gabor Rona, and Yemen's Saeed Mokbil – consulted with local officials, civil society organizations and representatives from UN agencies and other international partners.

During their mission, however, the Working Group was told that the Tunisian fighters are also populating a number of conflicts beyond Syria and Iraq with up to 1,500 combatants currently in Libya, 60 in Mali and 50 in Yemen.

As a result, the experts suggested, the Tunisian Government should develop a national strategic plan with the aim of responding to the diverse profiles and recruitment methods. Moreover, they added, the plan should have an immediate, medium and long-term impact, balance punitive against social measures, and ensure the comprehensive adoption of international human rights standards in all its elements.

The Working Group experts are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN human rights system, is the general name of the independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms of the Council that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world.

Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.
As Ukraine fighting continues, UN warns of worsening humanitarian crisis

10 July - The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine is continuing to deteriorate as the number of Ukrainians in need of assistance has now reached a total of five million people, a spokesperson for the United Nations relief arm reported today.

Addressing a press briefing held earlier this morning in Geneva, Jens Laerke, of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told reporters that almost 1.4 million people were internally displaced while another 3 million remained in non-government controlled areas. Both groups, he said were prioritized for humanitarian aid.

Despite the ongoing fighting, Mr Laerke also noted that humanitarian partners in Ukraine had already provided aid for more than 450,000 people this year, including food, emergency shelter, non-food items, medical consultations, nutrition and psychosocial support to children as well as emergency cash grants.

At the same time, he said, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) had recently announced plans to scale up emergency food assistance efforts in order to reach 500,000 conflict-affected people until the end of the year. This would require, however, the ability to traverse crossing points into non-government controlled areas, the OCHA spokesperson added.

Mr. Laerke further warned that funding of UN aid operations remained a concern with only 35 per cent of the total 316 million dollars requested having been received. The severity of the funding shortfall's impact is slated to grow as Ukraine's short summer turns into winter, exacerbating the needs of the country's most vulnerable people.

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.

Libya: UN envoy calls for end to fighting in Benghazi, urges political solution to crisis

10 July - The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Libya, Bernardino León, has condemned the escalating hostilities in the country's eastern city of Benghazi and the heavy toll being felt by the area's civilians, the United Nations mission in the country confirmed today.

In a press release issued earlier this morning, Mr. León, who also heads the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), deplored the repeated shelling of residential areas in the city while reiterating his belief that “there can be no military solution to the conflict.”

The fighting in Libya has provoked a growing displacement crisis within the country with the number of people displaced almost doubling from an estimated 230,000 last September to more than 434,000, according to the UN's refugee agency.

The largest bloc of internally displaced, some 105,000 people, is located in Benghazi, where the UN has been working with the municipality, as well as local and international NGOs to distribute items to some 6,000 of the most vulnerable IDPs between March and June.

Meanwhile, the violence is also adding to the mounting list of casualties. This week alone, noted UNSMIL, at least 10 fatalities were reported among civilians in Benghazi including a number of children.
“Coming at a time of successful reconciliation and ceasefire efforts at different localities in the country, and as the political dialogue among Libyan stakeholders was making major progress, it is high time for Benghazi which has suffered for too long to enjoy peace,” the UNSMIL press release continued.

“A vast majority of the Libyan people want an immediate end to the conflict. The Special Representative reiterates his conviction that a political agreement through dialogue is the best hope for achieving peace across Libya.”

Mr. León also reminded all parties that attacks against civilians were prohibited under international humanitarian law and could constitute war crimes. To that point, he called on all parties “to cease immediately all indiscriminate attacks.”

Leaders' personal rivalry has undermined South Sudan's hard won independence – Security Council

9 July - Months of politically motivated violence in South Sudan has left thousands dead and caused a “man-made…catastrophe,” the United Nations Security Council declared today, expressing “profound disappointment” with President Salva Kiir, former Vice-President Riek Machar and other leaders “who have put their personal ambitions ahead of the good of their country and their people.”

In a press statement noting that 9 July begins of the fourth year of independence for the world's youngest nation, Council members stressed that political sparring between South Sudan's key leadership has “jeopardized the foundation of this fledgling State,” and appealed for an urgent return to a political process that would end the ongoing crisis.

They noted that the failure of President Kiir and Mr. Machar to pursue peace has resulted in the death of tens of thousands of civilians, the displacement of more than 2.1 million people, and the attacks upon, and deaths of, UN peacekeepers, internally displaced persons receiving UN protection, and humanitarian personnel.

Reaffirming that such acts will not be tolerated, the Council renewed its grave alarm at the 19 months of violence in South Sudan “and the resulting man-made political, security, humanitarian and economic catastrophe.”

In the statement, Council members strongly condemned human rights violations and abuses, and violations of international humanitarian law in South Sudan, including those reported by UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Unity and Upper Nile states in April and May 2015, which included those involving castration, mass-rape, and the burning of women and children in their homes.

“They expressed their determination to support all efforts to hold those responsible to account for these crimes,” said the statement.

The Council recognized the work of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in leading the mediation since the onset of the crisis, and noted that while mediation efforts have been underway, there have been no signs that the parties are prepared to cease fighting and undertake a genuine peace process.

In this regard, the Council recognized the need for an urgent assessment and reinvigoration of the political process to develop and implement a comprehensive solution to end the crisis in South Sudan, and looked forward to renewed efforts by IGAD, the friends of South Sudan from Africa and abroad, and the United Nations to do so.

Further, the Council recalled the 1 July 2015 designation of six individuals under its resolution 2206 and reiterated its commitment to designate for sanctions political and military leaders that threaten the peace security and stability of South Sudan.

In light of the “significant deterioration” of the situation, the members of the Security Council underscored the urgent and imperative need to end impunity and ensuring accountability.
The Council also anticipated with interest the findings and recommendations of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan and encouraged the public release of the final report urgently, and in this regard, looked forward to the outcome of the African Union Peace and Security Council Ministerial-level meeting scheduled for 14 July 2015.

The security situation in South Sudan has deteriorated steadily over the past year since political in-fighting between President Kiir and his former Vice-President Machar, and their respective factions erupted in December 2013. The hostilities subsequently turned into a full-fledged conflict, resulting in reported atrocities and possible war crimes.

According to the latest estimates released by the UN refugee agency, more than 730,000 people have fled into neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan, which has seen the highest arrival rate this year. Meanwhile, among the millions that remain internally displaced, more than 100,000 have sought safety at increasingly crowded civilian protection sites run by UNMISS.

**Main UN economic forum closes high-level segment with calls to bolster sustainable development agenda**

10 July - Main UN economic forum closes high-level segment with calls to bolster sustainable development agenda

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is now stronger and must fully use its power to spur integration, and help mobilize a range of actors, including the UN system in the transition towards the sustainable development goals, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.

“Your discussions this week have helped to outline how the forum can organize its work, keep track of progress and bolster implementation. Our success will depend on a firm political will to work together,” said Mr. Ban in his closing remarks to the Ministerial portion of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development, under the auspices of ECOSOC.

Earlier this week, Mr. Ban was in Oslo, Norway, where he took part in the release of the final scorecard on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are set to expire this year, before the adoption.

“The world has made much progress over the past decade and a half. Extreme poverty and child mortality rates have been cut by more than half. More girls are in school. Fewer people are dying of killer diseases,” he highlighted.

Reminding Member States that these critical advances “did not happen on their own,” the Secretary-General said that they required strong financial support, political leadership, and enormous efforts of people themselves – “from the leadership of governments to the actions and hard work of the poorest villager.”

The MDGs have shown what is possible when the world comes together around common goals, he said. As the international community works to establish a new development agenda for the coming 15 years, “we know there is still a long way,” the Secretary-General acknowledged, saying that too many still suffer from chronic undernutrition and preventable diseases.

“At the same time, the broader picture of progress largely excludes women, and those at the lowest rungs of the economic ladder – as well as those discriminated because of age, disability or ethnicity.” And meanwhile, inequality is growing – climate change threatens the planet – and conflicts are derailing hard-won progress, he added.

Considering that ECOSOC is “the hub” for Member States and others to review progress, and to link the national, regional and global levels, Mr. Ban said the UN body demonstrated the value of bringing the system together to support implementation.

“It has served as The Partnerships Forum and has helped focus efforts and enhance effectiveness, which is critical for delivering on the post-2015 development agenda,” he underlined.
Travelling tomorrow to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where the Third International Conference on Financing for Development will open Monday 13 July, he underscored the importance of achieving an ambitious agreement there.

“By doing so, we can not only lay a framework for financing – but indeed, a framework for success as we look ahead to adopting the sustainable development goals in New York September – and governments making good on their commitment to approve a universal, meaningful climate agreement in Paris in December.”

Speaking on behalf of the ECOSOC President Martin Sajdik, Council Vice-President Oh Joon also welcomed the fact that the High-level Segment has offered valuable policy guidance for the transition from the MDGs to a “transformative, unified and universal post-2015 development agenda.”

“This transition will be a historic opportunity to advance prosperity for people and preservation of the planet. We must be ready to meet the full requirements of the new agenda,” he said.

“Through ECOSOC, Member States and others have emphasized the need to coordinate action to address the mounting global challenges; strengthen multilateralism, UN leadership and multi-stakeholder engagement to find common solutions; and manage global policy integration and coherence requirements.”

The High-level Segment as a whole, he said, made significant contributions to the collective efforts to pave way for implementing the new agenda.

“We have an important task before us. In the post-2015 era, we must mobilize our common resources, energy and vision to confront challenges – the fate of humanity and the planet. We have a shared responsibility to do so.”

Afghanistan: Security Council welcomes direct talks between Government and Taliban

10 July - The United Nations Security Council has welcomed the recently held direct talks between Afghan Government and Taliban representatives as a step towards “peace and reconciliation” in the region.

In a statement to the press issued late this afternoon, the 15-member Council said it encouraged the parties in the talks to continue building on their efforts through “an inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned dialogue” while also voicing appreciation for the constructive roles played by the Governments of Pakistan, China and the United States.

The talks – which were held on 7 July in the Pakistan capital of Islamabad – are just the first step in a series of confidence-building negotiations between the Central Asian Government and the group.

In addition to welcoming the engagement between the two sides, the Security Council today also reiterated the “vital role” that women have to play in the peace process and recalled the need for “the full, equal and effective participation of women at all its stages.”

Finally, the members of the Council reaffirmed their commitment to supporting Afghanistan on its path towards peace, reconciliation, democracy and development.

The Council's statement follows that of UN Special Representative in Afghanistan Nicholas Haysom who, on 8 July, suggested that the talks could be recognized as the outcome of the recent concerted efforts at rebuilding relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
Thailand's deportation of ethnic group prompts grave concern by UN human rights office

10 July - The United Nations human rights office today expressed grave concern over Thailand's deportation to China of more than 100 people understood to be ethnic Uighurs – including some 20 women – and strongly urged Thai authorities to ensure the protection of 60 others who remain in detention.

“The 109 individuals, who were part of a larger group of more than 350, had been detained in very poor conditions at various immigration detention facilities across Thailand since March 2014, when they were apprehended after leaving China on their way to Turkey,” Rupert Colville, the spokesman for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), told reporters in Geneva, Switzerland.

“Despite Turkey's reported willingness to admit them to its territory, only 172 of the 350 were eventually allowed to go to Turkey in late June,” he said, adding that some 60 others remain in detention in Thailand.

The UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment has repeatedly expressed concern to the Thai authorities that the deportation of this group to China would amount to “refoulement” and put them at risk of being tortured or subjected to other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The principle of non-refoulement is contained the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment to which Thailand is a party.

“We strongly urge the Thai authorities to ensure the protection of the 60 individuals who remain in detention and ensure that no further deportation of individuals, including potential refugees and asylum seekers, are made to countries where there are substantial grounds to believe that they would face an imminent risk of grave human rights violations, including torture,” Mr. Colville said.

The UN human rights office called on the Chinese authorities to ensure that those extradited are treated in full conformity with the country's human rights.

“We understand the Thai authorities have received diplomatic assurances from China that the people will be protected from harm, and urge both countries to ensure that this pledge is scrupulously observed,” Mr. Colville said.