Fundamental freedoms ‘inalienable and inherent – now and always,’ UN says on Human Rights Day

10 December - Marking this year’s Human Rights Day amid extraordinary global challenges, the United Nations is calling on the world to recognize and guarantee fundamental freedoms – long recognized “as the birthright of all people” – freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom of speech and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

“In a year that marks the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, we can draw inspiration from the history of the modern human rights movement, which emerged from the Second World War,” said Mr. Ban in a message to mark Human Rights Day, celebrated annually on 10 December.

Mr. Ban hailed the four basic freedoms identified by former United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt – freedom of expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear, and stressed that today's extraordinary challenges can be seen and addressed “through the lens of [those] four freedoms.”

The Secretary-General highlighted the condition of millions of people, who are denied freedom of expression and are living under threat and urged to defend, preserve and expand democratic practices and space for civil society for lasting stability.

Mr. Ban also noted that across the globe, terrorists have “hijacked religion, betraying its spirit by killing in its name,” or targeting minorities and exploring fears for political gain, thereby denying people their freedom of worship.

“In response, we must promote respect for diversity based on the fundamental equality of all people and the right to freedom of religion,” stressed the Secretary-General.
Speaking about freedom from want, UN chief said much of humankind is plagued by deprivation and called on world leaders to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the aim of ending poverty and enabling all people to live in dignity on a peaceful, healthy planet.

Mr. Ban also said that millions of refugees and internally displaced persons are a tragic product of the failure to fulfil the freedom from fear, adding that not since the Second World War have so many people been forced to flee their homes.

“They run from war, violence and injustice across continents and oceans, often risking their lives. In response, we must not close but open doors and guarantee the right of all to seek asylum, without any discrimination. Migrants seeking an escape from poverty and hopelessness should also enjoy their fundamental human rights,” said the Secretary-General.

Lastly, reaffirming UN’s commitment to protecting human rights as the foundation of the Organization’s work, Mr. Ban highlighted the features of the Human Rights Up Front initiative, which aims to prevent and respond to large-scale violations.

Echoing those sentiments, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein added that “freedom is the ideal that underpins what we now recognize as international human rights law, the norms and regulations that protect and guarantee our rights.”

In a video message, Mr. Zeid noted that Human Rights Day 2015 marks the launch of a year-long campaign to celebrate the 50th anniversary of two of the oldest international human rights treaties – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

“These two documents, along with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, form the ‘International Bill of Human Rights,’ which together set out the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights which are the birth right of all human beings,” said Mr. Zeid.

He also stressed that freedoms set out in these documents are universal, applicable to everyone, everywhere and noted that traditional practices, cultural norms, cannot justify taking them away.

“The world has changed since the UN General Assembly adopted the Two Covenants in 1966.

The Covenants, together with the other human rights treaties, have played an important role in securing better respect and recognition during the past five, at times turbulent, decades,” added Mr. Zeid.

At the same time, the UN rights chief noted that the drafters of the Covenants could have had little idea of issues such as digital privacy, counter-terrorism measures and climate change, but respect for freedom continues to be the foundation for peace, security and development for all.

Lastly, echoing the theme of this year’s Day, he urged everyone to join the celebration of freedom, to help “spread the message the world over that our rights, our freedoms are inalienable and inherent – now, and always.”

Speaking later in the day at a flower laying ceremony at Four Freedoms Park in New York, Mr. Zeid paid respects to President Roosevelt (FDR) and his wife Eleanor, recalling their significant contribution to human rights.

“In the months and years after FDR’s death, States shaped the United Nations, and wrote binding laws and agreed to be governed by them, so that they would form a web of protection from the threats of violence and deprivation,” said Mr. Zeid.

He also noted the growing turmoil across the globe, particularly in the Middle East and parts of Africa, where the region faces massive emergencies, are also generating an exodus of suffering amongst people who are not free of fear or of want.

Mr. Zeid added that new “nightmarish” violent groups are seeking to exterminate all those who dissent from their harsh and narrow world view.
“When humanity ceases to protect human rights, the system built to ward off chaos and violence begins to crumble; the chain of human security is broken; and selfishness, violence and conflict are unleashed in more and more ways in more and more places,” said Mr. Zeid.

Lastly, he stressed that it is imperative to translate FDR’s call for freedom from want into a reality, the absence of which was defined by the Secretary-General as ‘the silent crises – grinding poverty, hunger, inequality, discrimination and other threats to people’s lives and dignity.’

“Such extreme inequalities are unjust, divisive and socially corrosive. They breed economic instability, social unrest and can – and do –lead to conflict. This suffering is not inevitable: it is a product of the choices we make,” said Mr. Zeid urging all Member States to successfully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to save and improve millions of lives.

Later in the day, the Secretary-General addressed an award ceremony organized by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) called the Momentum for Change awards.

“Today, as never before, we see momentum for change coming from every sector of society,” he said. “The 16 award winners this year are focusing on some of the most important elements of climate action. From solar-powered solutions for households in sub-Saharan Africa, to communications tools that help rural farmers and Pacific Island nations better predict and adapt to climate change, they are achieving results.”

Mr. Ban added that these initiatives were launched by individuals who were inspired to turn the challenges posed by climate change into opportunities for new ways of building a more sustainable future.

**UN rights chief calls for DPR Korea to be referred to International Criminal Court**

The call from UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein is the latest chapter stemming from a report report by the UN Commission of Inquiry on human rights in the DPRK almost two years ago, which found “unspeakable atrocities” driven by policies established at the highest level of State.

It follows similar appeals from the General Assembly to the Council, which alone has the power to make such a referral, as well as from independent UN rights experts.

“The abduction of foreign nationals, the enforced disappearances, the trafficking and the continued movement of refugees and asylum-seekers makes this point clearly,” Mr. Zeid told the 15-Member body.

“These, in addition to a litany of other gross human rights violations, have still not been halted or reversed by the Government of the DPRK. Victims are still unable to find judicial redress and there is still no accountability grounded in the work of an independent judiciary,” he said, noting that it was apt that today’s discussions were taking place on International Human Rights Day.

“Once again, this year, the General Assembly has called on the Security Council to take action by referring the situation in DPRK to the International Criminal Court, which I believe to be essential, given the scale and extreme gravity of the allegations.”

But he said calls for accountability must go hand in hand with an open dialogue to encourage the Government toward reform and cited an invitation from the DPRK Foreign Minister for him to visit the country as a “welcome” sign of tentative efforts.
to engage in the international area.

“Millions of people in the DPRK continue to be denied their basic rights and freedoms,” Mr. Zeid said. “They are not allowed to move freely within and outside their country, or to speak out about injustices. They are not allowed to follow their faith. They are denied access to information not sanctioned by the regime, and the right to form organizations that can, in any way, be seen to be critical of the Government.”

He cited the Commission’s graphic description of the appalling nature of the DPRK’s political prison-camp system, where people including children have been deliberately starved, made to carry out forced labour, subjected to extrajudicial killings and summary executions, tortured and raped, where hundreds of thousands of people have died over several decades.

The camps are still believed to contain between 80,000 and 120,000 prisoners.

“The continuing violations and systemic failings simply heighten international anxieties over the possibility of a precipitous turn, an event of great centrifugal consequence, which could rapidly engulf the region,” he concluded.

“As we have stated time and again, if the international community is serious over reducing tensions in the region, more must be done collectively to ensure respect for human rights in the DPRK.”

Also addressing the Council, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman stressed that the international community has yet to find an effective way to address the deplorable state of human rights in the DPRK.

But he noted that although the DPRK has often made clear its objection to General Assembly resolutions on its human rights, unlike in 2014 it has refrained from raising the possibility of conducting a fourth nuclear test in its statements rejecting this year’s resolution.

Particular challenges have been posed on how to balance calls for accountability and focus on security matters, and the need for engagement and dialogue, he said.

'We can consign rabies to the history books’ with new plan to eliminate virus – UN health agency

10 December - Against the backdrop of one person dying every 10 minutes from rabies and that treatment for those bitten can cost 40 days of wages in some countries, the United Nations announced today a new framework to eliminate human rabies and save tens of thousands of lives each year by ensuring ready availability of vaccines and treatment, and emphasizing mass dog vaccinations to tackle the disease at its source.

“Rabies is 100 per cent preventable through vaccination and timely immunization after exposure, but access to post-bite treatment is expensive and is not affordable in many Asian and African countries,” said Dr. Margaret Chan, the Director-General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO).

“If we follow this more comprehensive approach, we can consign rabies to the history books,” Dr. Chan said in the WHO announcement.

The framework launched today by WHO, the World Organization for Animal Health, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Global Alliance for the Control of Rabies, calls for three key actions – making human vaccines and antibodies affordable, ensuring people who get bitten receive prompt treatment, and mass dog vaccinations to tackle the viral disease at its source.

The announcement comes as WHO is hosting in Geneva, Switzerland today and Friday, an international conference of experts, donors, and veterinary and public health officials who will adopt the plan of action that is expected to deliver prompt post-exposure prophylaxis for all in rabies endemic areas, as well as a framework for scaling up sustained, large-
scale dog vaccination.

“The first event of its kind, the conference will be instrumental in securing the required support to advance the goal of global elimination of rabies by 2030,” the target year of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations this year.

According to WHO, “tens of thousands of people die from rabies each year and, worldwide, 4 out of every 10 people bitten by suspected rabid dogs are children aged under the age of 15. One person dies every 10 minutes, with the greatest burden in Asia and Africa.”

“The cost of human vaccines to protect from rabies is, however, beyond the reach of many of those who may need it,” the agency said. “Treatment for people who are bitten can cost $40–50, representing an average of 40 days of wages in some of the affected countries.”

“Recognizing that human vaccination is currently not always affordable, the new framework emphasizes prevention through vaccinating dogs – whose bites cause 99 per cent of all human rabies cases,” it said. “A dog vaccine costs less than $1.”

Recent WHO-led pilot projects in the Philippines, South Africa, and Tanzania have demonstrated that mass vaccination of dogs can drastically reduce and eventually eliminate human rabies deaths.

But the new framework also calls for making more accessible human vaccines.

Bringing down the cost of human rabies vaccines and treatments will require strong international collaboration to make quality-assured vaccines and rabies immunoglobulin available to health centres in regions where rabies is endemic, the agency said.

Rabies is an infectious viral disease that is almost always fatal following the onset of clinical signs, according to WHO.

World economic growth falls below last forecast, only modest improvement foreseen – UN

10 December - The world economy has fallen below forecasts of even six months ago and will grow only modestly over the next two years due to “cyclical and structural headwinds,” including low commodity prices and stagnant investment, the United Nations reported today, urging steps to ensure stronger growth.

“Stronger and more coordinated policy efforts are needed to ensure robust, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, which will be a key determinant for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals,” UN Assistant Secretary-General of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Lenni Montiel said of the ambitious sustainability goals adopted at a UN summit in September.

Global growth is estimated at a mere 2.4 per cent in 2015, a downward 0.4 percentage-point revision from forecasts presented six months ago, according to the UN World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2016 report launched today.

Amid lower commodity prices, large capital outflows and increased financial market volatility, growth in developing and transition economies has slowed to its weakest pace since the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, it noted.

Given the anticipated slowdown in China and persistently weak economic performances in other large emerging economies, notably the Russia and Brazil, the pivot of global growth is partially shifting again towards developed economies.

The global economy is projected to grow by 2.9 per cent in 2016 and 3.2 per cent in 2017, supported by generally less...
restrictive fiscal and still accommodative monetary policy stances worldwide, according to the report.

“The expected timing and pace of normalization of the [United States] monetary policy will help reduce some policy uncertainties and provide impetus to revive investment,” Hamid Rashid, Chief of the UN’s Global Economic Monitoring Unit said in presenting the report.

But preventing excessive volatility and ensuring an orderly adjustment in asset prices also depends on commodity price stabilization and no further escalation in geo-political conflicts, the report noted.

Identifying five major headwinds, it cited persistent macroeconomic uncertainties; low commodity prices and diminished trade flows; rising volatility in exchange rates and capital flows; stagnant investment and productivity growth; and a continued disconnect between finance and real sector activities.

Weak growth is also adversely impacting labour markets in developing and transition economies, with unemployment on the rise, especially in South America, or stubbornly high, as in South Africa. At the same time, job insecurity is often becoming more entrenched amid a shift from salaried work to self-employment.

With persistent output gaps, modest wage growth and lower commodity prices, global inflation is at its lowest level since 2009. Deflation risks in developed economies have diminished, but not disappeared, particularly in Japan and the euro area.

Growth in developed economies will gain some momentum in 2016, surpassing the 2 per cent mark for the first time since 2010, the report notes. Economic growth in developing and transition economies is expected to bottom out and gradually recover, but the external environment will continue to be challenging and growth will remain well below its potential.

Monetary authorities need to make concerted efforts to reduce uncertainty and financial volatility, striking a delicate balance between economic growth and financial stability objectives, it stresses.

Given the massive build-up of private debt in many emerging economies, policymakers need to fine-tune their policy mix – more active fiscal policies, macro-prudential instruments, targeted labour market policies, among others – amid volatile global financial conditions.

The report highlights that monetary policies did most of the heavy-lifting since the global crisis to support growth but the time has come for fiscal policies to play a greater role. Well-designed and targeted labour market strategies are needed to complement fiscal policies to re-invigorate productivity, employment generation and output growth.

In a positive note on recent trends in environmental sustainability, it noted that global energy-related carbon emissions showed no growth in 2014 for the first time in 20 years, with the exception of 2009 when the global economy contracted. This suggests the possibility that the world might start to see some de-linking between economic growth and carbon emission growth.

**Yemen: UN delivers life-saving food aid to nearly 150,000 besieged residents in Taiz**

*10 December* - Braving fighting, airstrikes and checkpoints to bring life-saving aid to Yemenis living in dire conditions under a virtual state of siege, United Nations convoys have reached the central city of Taiz with enough food for nearly 145,000 people for a month, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) reported today.

“We are overcoming enormous access challenges to deliver much-needed assistance into the city, where the humanitarian situation has deteriorated over the past couple of months,” WFP’s Yemen Director Purnima Kashyap said, appealing for more funding to enable its

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Two convoys of 31 trucks carrying various types of food arrived on Tuesday in the city’s Salah and al-Qahira areas and a third is currently on its way to Mudhafar district.

Overall, WFP has had to confront extreme difficulties in the war-torn country, where nearly 8 million people face severe food insecurity, to reach a million people on average every month since the conflict started earlier this year.

In November, it delivered food for 10,000 people in Taiz, a fraction of the total number in need. Due to intense fighting and airstrikes, access by road has been extremely difficult. WFP trucks have been stuck at checkpoints and access generally has been very limited. But in recent weeks, coordination between all parties on the ground has allowed WFP to move aid into Taiz.

“WFP needs freedom and safety of movement inside the country to reach as many people as possible with food assistance before they fall deeper into hunger,” Ms. Kashyam stressed.

Taiz is one of 10 governorates out of 22 that are in the grip of severe food insecurity at ‘Emergency’ level – one step below famine on the five-point Integrated Food Security Phase Classification scale. At least one in five households in the area does not have enough food for a healthy life, has lost its livelihood and faces life-threatening rates of acute malnutrition.

“We continue to plead with all parties to the conflict to help us provide life-saving assistance in a timely manner throughout the country,” said Muhannad Hadi, WFP Regional Director for the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. “We seize all opportunities allowing us to deliver more assistance.”

The conflict has worsened Yemen’s already poor food security situation, adding more than 3 million people to the ranks of the hungry in less than a year. According to the UN’s 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview, 7.6 million people in Yemen are severely food insecure – a level of need that requires urgent, external, food assistance.

In November, WFP delivered food to all 19 governorates that are at Crisis and Emergency levels of hunger, reaching 1.8 million people.

**Already-powerful El Niño intensifying in Asia and the Pacific region – UN**

10 December - The ongoing El Niño weather pattern in the Asia and Pacific is likely to be one of the strongest since 1998 and will continue into early 2016, according to a new United Nations advisory, which urges regional cooperation for early warning, in-season mitigation, and long-term adaptation strategies to curb climate risk.

“The impact of the 2015-2016 El Niño could be even more severe in certain locations, such as the uplands of Cambodia, central and southern India, eastern Indonesia, the central and southern Philippines, central and northeast Thailand...” stated the Third Advisory Note on El Niño issued jointly by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES).

While many southeast Asian countries, particularly India and Sri Lanka, expect to face severe flooding caused by heavy rainfalls, some Pacific islands – Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Vanuatu, among others – have been experiencing a serious drought, causing water shortage and food insecurity, according to the report.

“One of the most significant impacts is on agriculture, which is a key component of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) for many Pacific countries,” warned the report.
Noting that the current UN climate change conference (COP21) in Paris has discussed and addressed the impacts brought by El Niño, and that actions are being taken in some countries, the publication provided key guidance in this regard.

Regional cooperation, the note stressed, is of great importance, given the transboundary nature of El Niño risks.

Early warning and monitoring, pre- or in-season mitigation, adaptation and response, as well as long-term risk management should be considered to tackle some shared vulnerabilities and risks.

“Only by coming together in the spirit of cooperation can the Asia-Pacific region hope to become truly disaster resilient and achieve sustainable development in the future,” said the guidance.

**Senior UN official appeals to donors to aid 53,000 displaced by attacks on Lake Chad islands**

10 December - More than 50,000 people forced to flee in the wake of attacks on islands of Lake Chad are living in “precarious conditions” in need of food, drinking water, shelter, health care and other services in a situation exacerbated by chronic drought, the top United Nations relief official in Chad says.

“A rapid funding of assistance is necessary to avoid a degradation of the situation, in a context of chronic drought and drying of Lake Chad, which impact on the peoples’ livelihoods,” said Stephen Tull, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Chad, who met this week with the displaced people in one of the 15 camps hosting them in the region.

Mr. Tull described one of the most recent attacks as “a massive violation of human rights and of international humanitarian law.”

The Lake Chad crisis struck in a general context of chronic vulnerability, affecting the livelihoods of local and displaced people – the majority of whom are fishermen, farmers, and pastoralists, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

To address the humanitarian needs of the people of the Lake Chad region, some $22.5 million has already been mobilized, which represents 38 per cent of the total amount required, according to OCHA. Since July 2015, most displaced people have received at least a one-month’s food ration. Latrines and boreholes are covering 45 per cent of water needs and 23 per cent of sanitation.

Despite these efforts, the more than 53,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled the Lake’s islands still need food, drinking water, shelter, health care, protection and education, OCHA reported.

Mr. Tull called on donors to support the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, a vital lifeline to strengthen operations capacities.

“The situation in the Lake shows that it is essential to integrate humanitarian action and development, in support of the Government,” he said.

He described the 5 December attacks which hit Koulfoua island, reportedly killing over 30 people and wounding at least 120 others, “as a massive violation of human rights and of international humanitarian law.”

Lake Chad straddles the borders of Chad, Niger and Cameroon in West Africa, and has been a source of freshwater for irrigation projects in each of these countries. Since 1963, the lake has shrunk to nearly a 20th of its original size, due both to climatic changes and to high demands for agricultural water, according to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).
COP21: UN chief calls on civil society to keep governments accountable on climate commitments

10 December - Meeting with civil society groups today at the United Nations climate change conference (COP21), Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he counts on grassroots organizations to help keep governments accountable, so they implement what they have committed to in words.

“One of the very valuable lessons that I’ve learned as Secretary-General during the last nine years is that no government, no international organization, can do its work properly without active engagement and support from civil society,” Mr. Ban told members of non-governmental organizations in Paris, alongside Al Gore, the former Vice-President of the United States and Chair of the Climate Reality Project.

On behalf of civil society groups, Mr. Gore thanked the Secretary-General for his tireless leadership to solve the climate crisis: “I’ve had the opportunity to work with you for quite a few years now and not many people know the focus and constant dedication that you have had to this issue,” he said.

The former Vice-President also presented a petition signed by 6.2 million people from around the world, as well as a joint statement on behalf of all civil society groups at COP21. It stated that these millions of individuals are “demanding a strong agreement that will shift the world away from carbon pollution and rapidly towards climate solutions.”

Noting his appreciation for the signatures, the UN chief highlighted that he thinks the world is standing at a very critical moment: “I’m hopeful and I’m reasonably optimistic that we’ll be able to have for the first time in the history of the United Nations a universal and very ambitious climate change agreement which will make our lives healthier and more prosperous.”

Since the beginning of last week, government representative have been negotiating a new agreement with the goal of limiting global temperature rise to less than two degrees Celsius. Yesterday, Laurent Fabius, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of COP21, said the intention is to have an adopted agreement by Friday.

“We would not be where we are today here in Paris, with 196 Parties poised to adopt a global climate change agreement, without the leadership and vision of civil society,” Mr. Ban insisted, adding that after Paris is over, their voices will be needed more than ever.

He also underlined civil society's critical role in driving climate action on the ground: “You have provided examples of new ways of working and innovative new solutions that are creating a greener, more sustainable world. I urge you to continue to demand more from all Governments,” the UN chief stated.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Director of Avaaz, a global web movement, told Mr. Ban she was at COP21 representing over three million people who are calling for 100 per cent clean energy by 2050.

“That ambitious goal is for them the metric of success, but they’re watching for something else – this conference can be a renewed level of hope in the UN process and the ability of governments to come together and cooperate,” said Emma Ruby-Sachs. “It’s greater than climate. This is about how we solve global problems.”

Holding back tears, Ms. Sachs also told the Secretary-General that she is expecting her first child in a couple of months, and she wants the next generation to feel hopeful about their planet.
Afghanistan: UN mission condemns Taliban attack at Kandahar Airport

10 December - The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) condemned the Taliban initiated attack at Kandahar airport on 8 December, which reportedly killed 39 civilians, including four children and injured at least 23 civilians.

A news release issued by the UN mission said that the complex attack, for which the Taliban claimed responsibility, continued with fighting for over 24 hours, during which time they intentionally targeted civilian areas of the base.

Initial reports gathered by UNAMA indicate that Taliban fighters dismounted their vehicles in the bazaar and opened fire, killing and injuring civilian shopkeepers and customers and the fighting reportedly continued in the residential areas of the base accommodating the families of Afghan security forces and airport staff.

The UN mission documented 54 deaths and 42 injured, according to its preliminary findings and those killed in the attack include 39 civilian males, of whom at least four were boys, 13 Afghan National Army and two Afghan National Police.

UNAMA said that the majority of the deceased appeared to be civilian shopkeepers working at the bazaar and civilian customers; of the 42 injured, at least 23 are civilian, including a woman and a girl.

The UN Mission expresses its sincere condolences to the families of the victims and wishes a speedy recovery to the injured.

Further, UNAMA reiterated that international humanitarian law, which applies to all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, prohibits attacks against civilians at any time and in any place, which additionally includes families of Afghan security forces and other civilians not participating in the conduct of hostilities.

Parties to the conflict must take all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population against the effects of attacks, UNAMA concluded.

UN and Singapore agree to develop information management tool for peacekeeping operations

10 December - The United Nations and the Government of Singapore today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to collaborate on the development of an information management tool in support of UN peacekeeping operations that can aid in enhancing situational awareness, trend analysis and early warning capacities in field missions.

“In view also of the recommendations of the Working Group I mandated last winter to look into the uses of technology that we can indeed maximize the use of current high end technologies to improve our awareness of the situations that we handle,” UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous said in New York after signing the MOU.

The event, organized by the UN Operations and Crisis Centre (UNOCC) and the Permanent Mission of Singapore to the United Nations, Mr. Ladsous also noted that the agreement is “terribly important” in light of the framework of all the recommendations set by the High-Level Panel on UN Peacekeeping Operations.
Under the MOU, Singapore will partner with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support to co-develop an information management tool that will add GIS (Geographic Information System) capabilities to existing situational awareness tools.

Mr. Ladsous said that another piece of software called ‘SAGE’ is in the process of development, but has many limitations and does not allow for real time changes and injection of new data by the users.

The new information management tool that is the focus of today’s MOU can provide the ability to visualize and analyze multiple layers of data on a map interface and is also expected to enhance the situational awareness, trend analysis and early warning capacities in peacekeeping missions, according to the UN.

“I thank the Republic of Singapore for helping us to create a new tool that will be very important, both on the ground for our Special Representatives, Force Commanders and others, and also for us in Headquarters, especially in UNOCC, which is playing a major role in consolidating all the information,” Mr. Ladsous emphasized.

He also noted that while “some cannot contribute many boots…there is such a thing as intellectual contribution and there, you stand at the very top.”

Reiterating Singapore’s significant contribution, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Field Support Anthony Banburry said countries such as Singapore that are “very committed to the issue of peace and security have much to offer,” especially at a time when the demand for peacekeeping has driven the need for creative ways to respond to threats and challenges.

 Ambassador Karen Tan of Singapore emphasized that the challenges faced in peacekeeping missions “require thinking outside the box to adjust to new challenges and conditions, as well as to stay ahead of the curve.”

“As pointed out in the report by the Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in UN Peacekeeping and the High-Level Panel on Peacekeeping Operations, instantaneous access to information, particularly in crisis situations, is one of the assets that top technology has brought to our lives. We need to bring that to peacekeeping as well,” said Ms. Tan.

She added that the new information management module can “significantly enhance the way we plan, monitor and conduct peacekeeping operations, which in-turn will translate to safer and effective mission execution.”

Lastly, she stressed that Singapore is “extremely pleased” with its meaningful and practical contribution and expressed hope that this model of cooperation will encourage other Member States that are able to do likewise to step forward as “technology-contributing countries.”

**UN human rights chief hails end of death penalty in Mongolia**

10 December - Hailing Mongolia’s recent abolition of the death penalty, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, commended the move as a “welcome step in the fight for the human rights of all.”

“This development is very encouraging and a clear example of positive progress in the fight for human rights for all – including people convicted of terrible crimes,” Mr. Zeid said in a statement, in which he added: “We must not allow even the most atrocious acts to strip us of our fundamental humanity.”

According to the High Commissioner’s Office (OHCHR), Mongolia’s passage of the law to end the death penalty, which is the result of strong and sustained leadership on the issue, has reaffirmed this essential truth.

Last week, Mongolia became the 105th country to abolish the death penalty in law. Another 60 States have moratoria, or have not carried out executions in the last 10 years, says OHCHR.