In new report, Ban outlines measures to strengthen UN peace operations, tackle abuse

11 September - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today presented his agenda to strengthen United Nations peacekeeping, including setting out three “fundamental” changes urgently required to adapt operations to new realities, as well as measures to root out sexual exploitation and abuse.

“The fundamentals of UN peace operations will not change. Our job is to support the negotiated settlement of conflicts and to protect civilians and advance their right to security, justice and development. It is essential that we are accountable and responsive to the needs of the people we serve,” Mr. Ban said in a statement on the release of his report, “The Future of UN Peace Operations.”

The report contains the Secretary-General’s agenda to take forward the recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel, set up in October 2014 and chaired by President Jose Ramos-Horta to examine how the full range of UN peace operations can be harnessed to address the spread and intensity of conflict today.

“I asked the Panel to be bold in their recommendations on how UN peace operations can be strengthened to better meet today’s challenges,” Mr. Ban noted. “Today, I present my agenda to take forward the Panel’s recommendations.

“I set out what I believe to be the priorities for UN peace operations and the steps we need to take to achieve them. In so doing, I draw on my experiences over the past eight years and the Panel’s comprehensive recommendations.”

The UN chief outlined three “fundamental” changes that are urgently required to adapt UN peace operations to current and future challenges, adding that the report contains a detailed action plan to set these changes in motion.

“First, we need to prioritise prevention and mediation if we are to break the cycle of responding too late and too expensively,” he stated.
“Second, we need to change the way we plan and conduct UN peace operations to make them faster, more responsive and more accountable to countries and people in conflict.

“Third, we must put in place a global-regional framework to manage today’s peace and security challenges,” he said, adding that this must start with a reinforced partnership between the UN and the African Union.

“Critically,” he continued, “we cannot be the source of additional suffering. My report therefore outlines over a dozen new measures I am taking to rid the United Nations of heinous sexual exploitation and abuse.”

The report of the 16-member Panel came 15 years after the release of the groundbreaking Brahimi Report, named after long-time UN adviser and renowned Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi who chaired a similar high-level panel convened by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Mr. Ban emphasized that “change will only take place if Member States and partners join me in this effort,” noting that his report lists “essential actions” the Security Council, Member States and contributing countries are invited to take.

“With political engagement and smart and targeted investments we can improve the world’s response to today’s horrors,” he stated.

“The 70th anniversary of the United Nations is the moment to rise to this challenge. I look forward to working with the entire Membership and all partners to advance this agenda.”

At an informal briefing to the General Assembly, Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson noted that effective peace operations deliver peace and security; help advance human rights; and help build the peaceful and inclusive societies on which development depends.

“Making UN peace operations fit for purpose helps advance all our UN goals,” he stated, adding that there is a clear link, therefore, between the Secretary-General’s report and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that countries will adopt later this month.

UN calls for full, swift implementation of European proposals for refugee crisis

**11 September** - The United Nations refugee agency today welcomed the European Commission’s proposals unveiled last Wednesday to address the current refugee crisis in Europe, adding that given the urgency of the situation, these proposals need to be implemented fully and swiftly.

“The proposed relocation scheme for 160,000 refugees from Greece, Italy and Hungary would go a long way to address this crisis,” William Spindler, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), said during a press briefing in Geneva.

“Our initial estimates indicate even higher needs, but the focus must now be on ensuring that all Member States take part in this initiative, and that it is swiftly implemented. When relocating them, refugees’ needs, preferences and specific qualifications should be taken into account to the extent possible,” he added.

UNHCR said the relocation scheme can only succeed if it is accompanied by large-scale emergency reception, assistance and registration efforts in the countries most impacted by arrivals, particularly Greece, Hungary and Italy. To support these countries, it underlined that the EU should mobilize its asylum, migration, and civil protection agencies and mechanisms, including the resources of member States, with the support of UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and civil society.
“When disembarking in Europe or entering the European Union, refugees must find a welcoming environment and immediate response to their basic needs,” Mr. Spindler stated.

UNHCR also welcomed the reference to opening legal channels for migration and encouraged member States to expand these legal avenues for refugees, through enhanced resettlement and humanitarian admission, family reunification, humanitarian visas, and other schemes. With more legal alternatives to reach safety in Europe, the agency said fewer people in need of international protection will be forced to resort to smugglers and undertake dangerous irregular journeys.

Meanwhile, while calling for strong measures to be taken against people traffickers and smugglers, UNHCR insisted that the management of borders needs to be consistent with national, EU and international law, including guaranteeing the right to seek asylum.

Mr. Spindler further underlined that UNHCR supports States implementing effective return policies for individuals found not to have a valid protection claim and who cannot benefit from alternative legal means to regularise their stay.

“These persons should be assisted to return quickly to their home countries, in full respect of their human rights,” he stated.

UNHCR added it is pleased to see a reference in the Commission’s proposals to the critical need to address the root causes of forced displacement around the world.

“A comprehensive response to refugee situations needs diplomacy, political will, and concerted action for the prevention, as well as resolution, of conflicts that force people to move,” the spokesperson continued. “Greater investment in conflict prevention and resolution as well as durable solutions should therefore form an integral part of Europe’s comprehensive approach to addressing forced displacement.”

In addition, efforts to address the root causes of the refugee crisis should include increased funding for humanitarian assistance to refugees and economic support to hosting countries, most notably around Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia, he stated.

UNHCR reported it is already ramping up its capacity in all countries affected by the current refugee flows and said it is ready to fully support all measures by the European Union in effectively responding to the present crisis.

Also today, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its deep concern at the current migration crisis in Europe, and underscored that the “continued shocking images that ricochet around the world do not tell the full extent of the devastating, and at times irreversible, impact” on children.

Ahead of the 14 September meeting in Brussels dedicated to the situation of migration outside and inside the European Union, the Committee urged EU Ministers to adopt a child rights-based approach when planning, discussing and implementing the measures designed to strengthen the European response.

“All European States have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and have committed to ensuring rights to all children that come under their jurisdiction irrespective of their legal status, and without discrimination of any kind,” said the Committee’s Chairperson, Benyam Dawit Mezmur.

He underlined that the majority of these children have already experienced human rights violations before leaving their countries of origin, and subjecting them to yet more violations within European borders through laws and treatment that are not child-friendly constitutes an additional serious violation of Convention obligations.

“The obligation to respect and protect the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence – physical or mental, intentional or non-intentional – needs to be upheld by all branches of governments,” Mr. Mezmur added, noting increasing visual evidence of police and other authorities acting in ways that may physically harm or traumatize migrant children.

He added that the Committee expects all governments to fully commit to placing at the heart of their responses their legal obligations towards children in a migration situation.
Senior UN official outlines steps taken in response to Central African Republic abuse allegations

11 September - The United Nations peacekeeping chief today announced that following reports of alleged sexual exploitation and abuse, seven peacekeepers serving with the UN mission in the Central African Republic (CAR) have been repatriated, while nine have had their payments suspended.

“There have been since the mission started last year 63 allegations of possible misconduct,” Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous told a press briefing in New York following a four-day visit to CAR.

“Out of these 63 allegations, 15 relate to possible sexual exploitation and abuse. […] Most of those cases are under investigation.”

In addition to meeting with Government officials and well as average citizens during his visit to the country, Mr. Ladsous met with personnel of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) and discussed the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse, in the wake of recent allegations.

He reported today that following one of the latest allegations involving a peacekeeper from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the UN asked the country’s authorities to send national investigators. The investigation reportedly took place and the UN is awaiting its conclusions.

In the meantime, he said the suspension of payments in nine of the alleged cases “is something that has a bite.”

“Fifteen cases is definitely 15 cases too much, and I had a long meeting with uniformed personnel in Bangui, I gave them a very, very, strong worded speech based, of course, on what the Secretary-General himself had said when the problem surfaced,” Mr. Ladsous stressed.

A meeting will soon take place at UN Headquarters with troop- and police-contributing countries during which Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will outline priorities to be achieved with their support. Mr. Ladsous said he and the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, Atul Khare, submitted a list of 40 proposals to Mr. Ban ten days ago.

“One very clear issue is whether we could actually name the countries concerned,” Mr. Ladsous explained. “I’m not talking of naming and shaming – shaming is something else – but naming because obviously it has to be known who is responsible, so we’ll look at that.”

Meanwhile, insisting that there is no excuse for misconduct, the peacekeeping chief also highlighted the very difficult living conditions under which UN personnel are living, especially in some of CAR’s provinces.

“I was appalled, even more so than on previous visits, by the conditions of our peacekeepers, the conditions they are living in, in Central Africa. Some had been deployed since the times of the African Union, 18 to 24 months. They have no opportunity to travel for rest and [recovery] because they don’t get money. We do give the Member States welfare money, but I’m not sure in many cases the soldiers see the colour of it.”

He added that the UN is looking at ways and means to offer peacekeepers “relatively cheap [rest and recovery] trips,” but that it would be difficult as the capital, Bangui, has a very poorly served airport with only one or two flights a day.

Mr. Ladsous once again reiterated that sexual abuse and exploitation is unacceptable. “It simply reflects on the United Nations, it reflects on the trust that people should feel for us and that we are, in a way, betraying,” he said.
Regarding the political situation in the country, the Under-Secretary-General insisted that elections in CAR should take place this year “in good time” as the second transitional government ends on 31 December, and there would be no third one.

**UN chief offers ‘good offices’ support in Colombia-Venezuela border dispute**

11 September - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has conveyed to the Foreign Ministers of Colombia and Venezuela that he “trusted” their countries would address the border challenges they faced through constructive dialogue, and offered his “good offices” mediation services if both parties so requested.

Mr. Ban met today at UN Headquarters with Delcy Rodriguez, Foreign Minister of Venezuela. This followed his meeting with Maria Ángela Holguín, Foreign Minister of Colombia, on 8 September.

During the meetings, the UN chief took note of the Foreign Ministers’ views regarding the situation along the Colombia-Venezuela border and conveyed that he is following the situation with concern.

“The Secretary-General conveyed to the two Foreign Ministers that he trusted both countries would address border challenges through constructive dialogue,” UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told reporters. “He offered his good offices if both countries so requested.”

The good offices and mediation roles of the Secretary-General in the prevention and the peaceful settlement of disputes derive from the UN Charter and have been developed through extensive practice. These roles can be set in motion at the Secretary-General’s own initiative, in response to a request from one or more of the parties to a dispute, or as a result of a request from the Security Council or the General Assembly.

**France and Bulgaria must halt forced evictions of Roma, says UN human rights chief**

11 September - Ongoing forced evictions of Roma and Travellers in a number of European States, including France and Bulgaria, are cause for serious concern, the United Nations human rights chief said today.

On 7 September, after anti-Roma riots last July, Bulgarian authorities evicted Roma from the Kremikovtsi settlement in the municipality of Gurmen. According to civil society sources, no alternative accommodation was offered and a total of 41 people, including 21 children, were made homeless as a result. Further evictions in the area, as well as in Varna municipality, are now feared.

“I urge Bulgaria to halt these forced evictions which are devastating to the affected communities,” said High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein. “The recommendations of various international human rights mechanisms covering such situations should be adhered to, and no one should be made homeless.”

In France, more than 150 Roma in the municipality of La Courneuve were forcibly evicted from their homes in August. Those evicted are reportedly living in tents and relying on support from civil society activists, who are making efforts to ensure that the children are able to attend school, despite the authorities’ reluctance to register them.

“From the perspective of rights of the child, this is extremely worrying,” the High Commissioner said.

He also noted that this was the latest in a succession of forced evictions of Roma migrants in France, and expressed his concern at reports that further evictions are planned.
“It is becoming increasingly apparent that there is a systematic national policy to forcibly evict the Roma,” he said. “Two key international treaty bodies, namely the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Human Rights Committee, earlier this year both urged France to refrain from such forced evictions without the provision of alternative housing.

“I join them in calling on France to replace this punitive and destructive policy with a policy of genuine inclusion.”

France and Bulgaria are not alone; forced evictions of Roma and Travellers have continued in a number of European countries in recent years.

The High Commissioner noted that there have been some positive developments, including the halting of a planned forced eviction of a Roma settlement in Grmec by the Serbian authorities. Also, a Serbian court has for the first time applied the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the national legal system.

“These developments are welcome,” the High Commissioner said. “I urge other States to follow suit, and make a much greater effort to treat the Roma sensitively and fairly, in accordance with international standards. Failure to do so simply exacerbates entrenched popular discrimination against what is already one of Europe’s most deprived and marginalized communities.”

UN rights experts applaud steps by China and India to reduce, abolish death penalty

11 September - Two independent United Nations human rights experts welcomed today the recommendation to abolish the death penalty by India, as well as the decision to reduce the number of crimes subject to the death penalty by the Chinese authorities.

In August, the Indian Law Commission issued a report concluding that the death penalty does not act as an effective deterrent, and recommended its abolition for all crimes except terrorism-related offences, and waging war.

“The conclusions and recommendations of the Indian Law Commission represent an important voice in favour of the abolition of the death penalty in India,” said the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns. “I encourage the Indian authorities to implement these recommendations and to move towards the complete abolition of the death penalty for all offences.”

Juan Méndez, the Special Rapporteur on torture, noted that the Commission “recognized the immense suffering caused by the death row phenomenon as a seemingly inevitable consequence of the imposition of the death penalty; this recognition supports the emergence of a customary norm that considers the death penalty as, per se, running afoul of the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.”

The Indian authorities should review the findings very carefully and ratify the Convention against Torture, he added.

China amended several provisions of its Criminal Law after the session of the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, replacing the death penalty by life imprisonment for several offences, including the smuggling of weapons, ammunition, nuclear materials and counterfeit currency; arranging for a person or forcing a person to carry out prostitution; the obstruction of duty of a police officer; and creating rumours during wartime to mislead people.

“By adopting these amendments to its criminal code, China has made progress in the right direction; this needs to be encouraged,” the UN experts noted.

“These new developments in India and China are in line with the general trend towards the abolition of the death penalty at a global level, even if there are isolated moves in the opposite direction,” said Mr. Heyns.

Special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country
situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

**Forests of the future fundamental to achieving Sustainable Development Goals – UN agency**

**11 September** - The 14th World Forestry Congress concluded today with a declaration setting out a vision for 2050 that sees forests playing “a decisive role” in ending hunger, improving livelihoods and combating climate change, said the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The Congress “underlined that forests are critical to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a message to the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, which will meet later this month in New York to adopt the 2030 development agenda,” FAO said in a news release.

The message says that SDG 15, which addresses the need to sustainably manage forests, trees and forests, is key to achieving several of the other goals, including those related to ending poverty, achieving food security, promoting sustainable agriculture and ensuring sustainable energy for all.

World Forestry Congresses have been held under the auspices of FAO since the establishment of the Organization in 1945.

After a weeklong meeting in Durban, South Africa, the Congress also issued a message to the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), set to meet in Paris in December 2015 to hash out a new global climate change agreement.

“Climate change poses a serious threat to the planet, forests and forest-dependent people. However, at the same time, countries’ responses to climate change can present new opportunities for forests, such as additional sources of financing and greater political support for forest governance,” the message says.

In addition, Congress participants recommended a set of actions that include increasing understanding among governments and other stakeholders of both the challenges and opportunities that climate change presents.

While saying that world’s forests must be recognized as “more than trees,” the so-called Durban Declaration adopted today drew attention to the fact that forests hold vast potential to play a decisive role in ending hunger, improving livelihoods and combating climate change.

“The largest gathering on forests this decade set out its vision of how forests and forestry should look in 2050,” FAO said. “The vision calls for the forests of the future to be ‘fundamental’ for food security and improved livelihoods.”

“The declaration reflects the extremely rich and diverse set of viewpoints and experiences of all participants in the Congress, who recommended ways to make the vision a reality,” said Tiina Vähänen, Deputy Director of FAO’s Forest Assessment, Management and Conservation Division.

The Congress also saw the launch of an international five-year forests and water action plan to recognize the role of trees and forests in maintaining the water cycle, and to ensure appropriate management of one of the world’s largest sources of freshwater.

Almost 4,000 delegates from 142 countries attended the Congress, including representatives from civil society, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, universities and the private sector as well as around 30 ministers and deputy ministers.

The Congress is held every six years, and this year’s event was hosted by South Africa with technical support from FAO and marked the first time the gathering was held on African soil since its inception in 1926.
Amid political violence in Nepal, Ban stresses need for dialogue, respect for peaceful protest

11 September - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is concerned about the recent violence in Nepal and saddened by the loss of lives, a spokesperson for the United Nations chief said today.

Stéphane Dujarric told reporters in New York that Mr. Ban is following closely the situation in the South Asian nation, which is in the last stages of preparing a new constitution.

“He stresses the importance of dialogue and non-violence as well as respect for peaceful protest and freedom of assembly,” said Mr. Dujarric.

“The Secretary-General welcomes the decision of the political parties to temporarily pause the constitution voting process. He urges all stakeholders to use this opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue,” he added.

National Geographic Society wins UN environmental prize for science and innovation

11 September - The National Geographic Society, one of the largest non-profit scientific and educational institutions in the world that reaches more than 700 million people each month, is this year’s winner of the United Nations Champions of the Earth award in the area of science and innovation.

“In a year when the world aims to finalize the Sustainable Development Goals and sign a new agreement on climate change, the influence and leadership demonstrated by National Geographic is more important than ever,” said Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), in announcing the award.

The National Geographic Society joins South Africa’s Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit as the winners announced so far.

The remaining laureates will be revealed throughout September, UNEP said, and the awards will be handed out at a ceremony at the close of the Sustainable Development Summit, to be held from 25 to 27 September at UN Headquarters.

“The National Geographic Society is a unique organization driven by a passionate belief in the power of science, exploration and storytelling to enlighten, excite and change the world,” Mr. Steiner said. “By engaging citizens and stakeholders in solutions-based thinking and dialogue, they directly address environmental issues that impact us all – from air quality and biodiversity to sustainable cities and ecosystem management.”

National Geographic has supported some of the most historic expeditions in the world, including the first explorers to reach the North Pole and the discovery of Machu Picchu – a lost mountaintop city of the Inca, in the Peruvian Andes, as well as critical species studies such as Jane Goodall’s chimpanzee research in Tanzania’s Gombe Stream Park and Dian Fossey’s mountain gorilla research in Rwanda.

Since its creation in 1888, UNEP said, the Society has funded thousands of research, conservation and education programmes around the globe to support the next generation of explorers and scientists as they push the boundaries of discovery and encourage citizen science.
And every month, National Geographic reaches more than 700 million people through its media platforms, products and events.

“The research, ground-breaking articles and stunning photography published in their magazines and publicized on television inspire people to care about the planet, giving them the transformational power to form opinion and influence the development trajectory of our planet,” according to UNEP.

The annual Champions of the Earth award is the highest environmental accolade that the UN can confer upon outstanding individuals and organizations.

**Welcoming upcoming talks, Security Council calls on Yemeni parties to speed up peace efforts**

**11 September** - The United Nations Security Council today welcomed the announcement on the upcoming Yemeni peace talks and commended the decision by the Government to participate in them along with other parties.

In a statement issued to the press, the 15-member body emphasized the need for a peaceful, orderly, inclusive and Yemeni-led transition process, and reiterated its call on all parties to “resume and accelerate” UN-brokered inclusive political consultations.

The talks will be convened in the region next week by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, who yesterday welcomed the commitment of the Government, the Houthis and the General People's Congress to participate.

“The members of the Security Council reaffirmed their call on Yemeni parties to attend the announced talks and any such future talks and engage without preconditions and in good faith, including by resolving their differences through dialogue and consultations, rejecting acts of violence to achieve political goals, and refraining from provocation and all unilateral actions to undermine the political transition,” said today’s statement.

They also expressed their support and appreciation for the efforts of the Special Envoy, who will continue to engage with all Yemeni stakeholders to take steps towards a durable ceasefire and a mechanism for the withdrawal of forces, release of political prisoners and the resumption of an inclusive political transition process.

In addition, the Council expressed deep concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Yemen, including the food insecurity already facing millions of Yemenis across the country and the increasing risk of famine. They encouraged the international community to contribute to the $1.6 billion UN humanitarian appeal, which was currently only around 24 per cent funded.