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On India visit, Ban stresses country’s role in security, human rights, development

12 January - India can play a major role in addressing global challenges such as poverty, displacement, terrorism and climate change, said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today as he addressed the Indian Council of World Affairs, calling on the country to drive peace, champion human rights and lead on sustainable development.

“As the world’s largest democracy, India has important lessons for others,” the Secretary-General said, welcoming India’s efforts to deepen cooperation in South Asia, calling for new approaches to the dispute with Pakistan and stressing the need to support Afghan-led peace and reconciliation efforts.

“Challenges should be addressed through such initiatives as the [region-led] Istanbul Process and growing bilateral and multilateral partnership agreements,” he said referring to the latter situation.

As well as calling for regional approaches to terrorism, through implementing the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, he pointed to India’s generous peacekeeping contributions, but warned against continued growth of nuclear arsenals in the region.

“Governments are investing in weapons while cutting their health budgets,” he said. “Each addition to the arsenals raises the risks of a nuclear nightmare.”

Mr. Ban saw possibilities for improved economic growth and overall human progress in India as it worked to become a
global manufacturing hub, and he welcomed Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s prioritization of smart cities and energy security as part of action on climate change.

“Renewable energy offers huge business opportunities,” he said, recalling a visit yesterday to Canal Top Solar Power Plant in Gujarat state. “This year, the world must seize the chance to achieve a meaningful global agreement at the Paris climate conference. That agreement can trigger large investment flows, spark innovation and push low-carbon technologies into global markets. India can be a major part of this new flow of goods and resources.”

As he turned to human rights, he stressed the need to share the spoils of growth, evoking the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi’s teachings. Pointing to Gandhi’s efforts to ban discrimination based on caste, he also referred to the “special challenge” India faced in tackling violence against women, thanking Prime Minister Modi for his support for the UN HeForShe campaign to change mind-sets and mobilize men for gender equality.

The Secretary-General also referred to the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi during remarks he made at the launch of UN@70 with Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi and UN Goodwill Ambassadors, who included Sachin Tendulkar, Sharmila Tagore and Nandita Das.

“From the very birth of the idea of the United Nations, [Gandhi] supported it,” said Mr. Ban. “[He] once said, ‘India would be morally bound to help the United Nations.’”

For the UN@70 event, he said the timing of the launch, on India’s National Youth Day, was perfect, and applauded the fact that the commemorations in India had been based on partnerships and had used the amplifying power of social media to spread the word.

“India has more young people than any other country in the world,” Mr. Ban said. “The number of young people under 25 – you are the biggest country in that regard.”

Speaking in tweet-sized chunks, the Secretary-General delivered three messages to those present, suggesting they pushed them out on their own social networks.

“First: Investing in women and children is the most powerful way to attain global progress. Second: We have to fight for the equality of all members of our human family regardless of any difference, including sexual orientation. Third: When we strengthen the UN-India partnership, this country and our world will advance.”

He underlined the priority he placed on women’s and children’s welfare, adding that he was proud to stand for equality of all, including those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, and stressed that he came to India to strengthen the partnership and to ensure the collaboration was good for India and the world.

In both speeches, Mr. Ban referred to India’s strong commitment to the UN, pointing to the country’s top ranking among troop-contributing countries, corporate Global Compact members and on contributions to the UN Democracy Fund. At the same time, the challenges the country faced mirrored global challenges, like poverty, gender inequality, discrimination, environmental degradation, extremism and other security threats.

“Humanity can overcome these challenges by working in our shared interest, working as one, to have the strength of one become the strength of all,” said Mr. Ban to the Council on World Affairs. “I have seen India’s impressive advances over the decades. I see this country’s great global potential.”
Five years on, Ban honours Haiti’s earthquake victims, looks ahead to brighter future

12 January - Marking the anniversary of the massive earthquake that struck Haiti five years ago today, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has paid tribute to the more than 200,000 victims, including 102 United Nations personnel, who perished, and declared that in sorrow, there is the promise of hope that the progress achieved by the Haitian people in the wake of the tragic event could be built upon.

“I vividly recall the devastation and suffering I witnessed during my visits to Haiti in the aftermath of the catastrophe. The sense of grief remains fresh in our minds, said the Secretary-General in a message on the sombre occasion.

“Today, we honour the memories of the daughters and sons, fathers and mothers, friends and loved ones who lost their lives. We also pay homage to those who survived and whose resilience and commitment are a source of inspiration to the world,” he said.

Mr. Ban recalled that last week, he had the honour of unveiling a memorial for UN colleagues who died on that terrible day.

“Today, I ask that we join together to celebrate their lives and contributions to Haiti and its people. We remain eternally grateful for their sacrifices.”

Yet the Secretary-General pointed out that in sorrow, there is the promise of hope. Last year, he returned to Haiti and had seen the progress that has been achieved. He commended the Haitian people for their perseverance and urged the international community to continue its invaluable support for the benefit and future of all Haitians.

“Haiti’s recovery has not been easy. There have been – and continue to be – setbacks along the way, and there is much work still to be done to ensure political and institutional stability, democratic governance and sustainable development,” said the UN chief.

“However, let today be a day of remembrance and one of hope for a stable and prosperous Haiti. Together, let us strive towards a bright future for Haiti,” he concluded.

In an interview with UN Radio, General Jose Luiz Jaborandy, Jr., Force Commander of the UN Stabilization Mission in the country (MINUSTAH), said that throughout its 11 year history, the Mission had always stood with the people and Government of Haiti. In 2010, he said, both the country and MINUSTAH had suffered a great tragedy, and today was a day to celebrate their sacrifice in the name of peace.

“So, we are here, with the people and to [support] the national authorities to regain the path to the future; looking forward in a positive way, for the benefit of the Haitian people,” he said.

On the political situation, General Jaborandy expressed hope that the national authorities would show willingness to build a consensus to overcome the current impasse and to begin working had to provide the stability and resources that the Haitian people need for the future.
UN study finds increase in women managers, urges greater efforts for workforce equality

12 January - The last 20 years has seen a surge in the number of women employed in senior and middle management positions, according to a new United Nations report, which notes that although all-male company boards are decreasing in number, more must be done to achieve gender parity.

The study, released by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and entitled Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum, covers 80 of the 108 countries for which ILO data is available.

It finds that over the past two decades women have attained 20 per cent or more of all board seats in a handful of countries: Norway, which, at 13.3 per cent, boasts the highest global proportion of companies with a woman as company chairperson, is closely followed by Turkey at 11.1 per cent.

“Our research is showing that women’s ever increasing participation in the labour market has been the biggest engine of global growth and competitiveness,” said Deborah France-Massin, Director of the ILO Bureau for Employers’ Activities, in a press release.

“An increasing number of studies are also demonstrating positive links between women’s participation in top decision-making teams and structures and business performance,” Ms. France-Massin continued, adding that nonetheless there remained “a long way to go” before true gender equality in the workplace is achieved, particularly in top management positions.

Despite the headway made in equalizing the gender gap at management levels, only five per cent or less of the CEOs of the world’s largest corporation are women, the report points out, adding that the larger the company, the less likely it is that a woman will be at its head.

“It is critical for more women to reach senior management positions in strategic areas to build a pool of potential candidates for top jobs such as CEO or company presidents,” the ILO official explained, indicating that so-called ‘glass walls’ still existed with a concentration of women remaining in certain types of management functions like human resources, communications, and administration.

In addition, the report’s findings show that women own and manage over 30 per cent of all businesses but that they are more likely to be found in micro and small enterprises. As a result, helping women grow their businesses remains not only critical for increasing gender equality but also for overall national economic development.

According to the report, Jamaica has the highest proportion of women managers at 59.3 per cent while Yemen has the least with 2.1 per cent. For its part, the United States is in 15th place in the list of 108 countries with 42.7 per cent women managers while the United Kingdom is in 41st place with 34.2 per cent.

Further action in reducing gender equality is critical, Ms. France-Massin said, warning that without it, “it could take 100 to 200 years to achieve parity at the top.”

The report thus outlines a number of recommendations to close the remaining gender gap, including seeking ‘flexible solutions’ to manage work and family time commitments as an alternative to being subject to special treatment or quotas; providing maternity protection coverage and childcare support for professional women; ‘changing mind-sets’ to break cultural barriers and fight sexual harassment; and implementing gender-sensitive human resources policies and measures.

“It is time to smash the glass ceiling for good to avoid controversial mandatory quotas that are not always necessary or effective,” said Ms. France-Massin. “Having women in top positions is simply good for business.”
World Bank says Ebola puts future prosperity of Liberia, Sierra Leone ‘at high risk’

12 January - Job losses and food insecurity are among the far-reaching and persistent socio-economic impacts of Ebola in Liberia and Sierra Leone, according to the results of two new World Bank Group surveys released today.

“[Ebola’s] socio-economic side effects put the current and future prosperity of households in Liberia and Sierra Leone at high risk,” said Ana Revenga, Senior Director for Poverty at the World Bank Group. “We must pay careful attention to those who are most vulnerable to both health and economic shocks, and ensure that they are supported throughout and after the crisis.”

The Liberian economy continues to shed jobs faster than they are replaced, with nearly half of household heads still out of work despite response-related jobs becoming available in construction and health fields. Most job losses are among private sector wage workers in urban areas, with women reported to be particularly vulnerable to the stagnant labour market, as they are disproportionately employed in non-farm self-employment.

In Sierra Leone, the first round of data collection found wage and non-farm self-employed workers seeing the largest declines in urban employment, with Ebola cited as the main cause. An estimated 179,000 people had stopped working outside of the agriculture sector. Most job losses were attributed to preventive efforts to limit the disease’s spread and to the general economic disruption caused by the outbreak, with quarantined and non-quarantined districts describing similar impacts.

The two reports found food insecurity persisting in both countries, with two-thirds of Liberian households reporting a lack of money to afford rice, regardless of price, three quarters indicating they worried about having enough to eat, and 80 per cent citing lack of money rather than availability or high prices.

No evidence was found on Ebola’s direct negative impacts on agriculture in Sierra Leone but harvest activities there were ongoing and future surveys are planned which will track any Ebola-related effects if and when they arise.

Over 80 per cent of those responding to the mobile phone survey in Liberia reported reduced harvests compared to last year, with the main concern the inability to organize work teams given Ebola fears. The same issue was cited as the main reason for incomplete harvests.

The survey showed some evidence of reduced use of health services for non-Ebola conditions in the Sierra Leonean capital, Freetown, with a much lower proportion of women reporting for post-natal clinic visits there compared to 2013. Elsewhere in the country there was little evidence of such a decline.

“From a poverty perspective, we are particularly concerned about households being forced into coping strategies that may harm their long term prospects to improve welfare, and now we can follow this in almost real time,” said Kristen Himelein, the World Bank Group’s poverty economist for Liberia and Sierra Leone.

“These high frequency surveys have been enormously helpful in bridging the gap between country-level growth analysis and the observations from those on the ground as part of the response,” she added.

The surveys are part of the World Bank’s $1 billion outbreak response and complement previous analysis that pointed to a possible $32.6 billion regional economic impact, which could catastrophic for these already fragile States. The surveys will continue in both countries, monitoring Ebola’s effects on economies and households and aiming to help Governments tackle the most pressing economic issues and plan the recovery.
Burundi: UN electoral mission prepared to help country in ‘decisive’ return to peace

12 January - The United Nations Electoral Observation Mission in Burundi, known by its French acronym MENUB, officially launched its activities today in the capital of Bujumbura as the country prepares for critical elections to be held later this year amid an atmosphere of reconciliation.

“Dialogue can open the way for compromise and help lead to solutions for even the most difficult of problems,” the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy and MENUB chief, Cassam Uteem, said earlier this morning at a ceremony marking the Mission’s launch.

The UN Security Council set the creation of MENUB in motion in February 2014 following the Burundi Government’s request for a UN-backed electoral observer mission before, during and after presidential, parliamentary and local polls, scheduled between May and September 2015.

“We would also encourage the Government to continue the dialogue begun in March 2013 and reassure all those who wish to take part in the electoral process that they will face no obstacles,” continued Mr. Uteem, as he called on all stakeholders to respect the outcome of the upcoming elections.

The UN official reminded those gathered – among which were former Government officials, representatives of institutions and members of civil society – that the election would affect all Burundians and called on the country’s Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) to take “appropriate measures” to ensure the polls’ smooth running while also widening participation in the electoral process to all eligible people. In addition, he welcomed CENI’s organization of workshops aimed at monitoring voting registration and potential irregularities.

The Mission replaced the UN Office in Burundi (BNUB), which was set up in 2006 following a ceasefire between the Government and the last remaining rebel forces to support peace consolidation, democratic governance, disarmament and reform of the security sector.

Burundi was the first country, along with Sierra Leone, to be put on the agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which was also established in 2006, to ensure that countries once ravaged by war do not relapse into bloodshed.

The Secretary-General’s Special Envoy acknowledged that the Mission was in Burundi to help ease the country towards a long-standing peace based on a legitimate democratic process, and he urged the international community to also remain committed to helping the Burundian people, so the country may “decisively turn towards peace and spend most of its resources on the only battle that needs to be fought – that of development and the eradication of poverty.”
Cities in Central Asia, Caucasus sign up to UN campaign to become more resilient

12 January - Eight cities in Central Asia and the Caucasus, including capitals Tbilisi and Bishkek, have signed on to strengthen community resilience by integrating disaster risk reduction into their national and local policy, representing a big boost for the United Nations initiative which already has over 2,400 participants worldwide.

The global campaign, Making Cities Resilient: My City is Getting Ready!, launched in 2010 for a period of five years until 2015, is promoted by the Geneva-based UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR).

“The campaign helps participants to become better organized and to identify key priorities for action for risk reduction. They can also benefit from the shared experience of other participants facing similar challenges. It is a very dynamic and interactive campaign,” said Madhavi Malalgoda Ariyabandu, UNISDR regional coordinator.

UNISDR’s initiative, now in partnership with the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), is titled “Strengthened Disaster Risk Reduction in Central Asia and the Caucasus through greater fostering of the Hyogo Framework for Action priorities.”

The eight cities to sign up are Noyemberyan and Berd in Armenia; Tbilisi and Gori in Georgia; Oskemen and Ridder in Kazakhstan; and Bishkek and Kara-Kol in Kyrgyzstan.

“These cities and towns are committing to a ten-point checklist of actions which help them to become resilient to disasters and to manage their growth in a sustainable way,” said Ms. Ariyabandu.

The worldwide campaign is based on 10 essentials for developing local resilience, which in turn build on the five priorities for action of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), endorsed by UN Member States for the period 2005-2015.

Central Asia and the Caucasus are exposed to a range of natural and technological hazards such as earthquakes, landslides, mud and debris flows, avalanches, floods, drought and extreme temperatures inflicting serious human and economic losses. Risks and exposure to risk are exacerbated by the rapid growth of urban population and climate change.

Over the 30-year period from 1980, 14 million people were affected by 131 major disaster events with economic losses of $3.8 billion. The destructive earthquake in Spitak, Armenia in 1988 and the extreme cold spell across Central Asia in 2008, prove the importance of strengthening communities.

To address these challenges, the campaign will aim to build local capacity to assess risks of natural hazards, update action plans which are disaster risk inclusive, increase accessibility of international expertise in disaster risk reduction, and foster exchange of experiences between municipalities and local governments.

A post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction is expected to be approved at a world conference, in March 2015, in Sendai, Japan, emphasizing the need to continue to work to strengthen community resilience, particularly in municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants.
UN Afghanistan mission welcomes Government's nomination of unity cabinet

12 January - The nomination of Afghanistan's unity cabinet, part of a wider move to bring together the country's political factions is an important milestone in the nation's political development, the top United Nations envoy there announced today.

In a press statement welcoming the nomination of Ministers and senior officials as part of the implementation of the agreement for a National Unity Government, the head of the UN Assistance Mission (UNAMA), Nicholas Haysom, today suggested the move was indicative of the country's positive political momentum.

“The spirit of respectful collaboration demonstrated by President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, and their teams, in agreeing these nominations is a welcome manifestation of their partnership and cooperation,” Mr. Haysom said.

“Given the many pressing issues facing Afghanistan, it is to be hoped that this process can be undertaken in a smooth and timely manner.”

The unity cabinet has yet to be approved by the Wolesi Jirga, the National Assembly's Lower House, as prescribed by the country's constitution.

Nonetheless, Mr. Haysom declared the ongoing commitment of the UN to the country as a “reliable partner” and said the Mission looked “forward to working with all new Ministers and officials in support of the Government's work.”

The announcement of the unity cabinet nomination comes amid a brutal upsurge in attacks throughout the country.

2014, in fact, was the deadliest year for Afghan civilians since 2009 and the UN mission in the country has documented a rising number of civilian casualties attributed, in large part, to increased ground engagements and the increased use of improvised explosive devices – both of which are killing and injuring more Afghan civilians than previously documented by UNAMA.

In phone call, UN chief congratulates newly elected President of Sri Lanka

12 January - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a phone call to Sri Lanka today, congratulated newly elected President Maithripala Sirisena and discussed the nation’s future development plans and post-war agenda.

Mr. Ban called Mr. Sirisena to congratulate him and the country on the successful conclusion of the presidential election, according to a statement released by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson at UN Headquarters in New York today.

“The Secretary-General and Mr. President Sirisena discussed the President’s 100-day plan and Sri Lanka’s post-war agenda. The Secretary-General affirmed continuous support by the UN to Sri Lanka,” the statement said.

Mr. Sirisena was elected as Sri Lanka’s president last week. At the time, Mr. Ban welcomed the constitutional transfer of power. He also applauded the Sri Lankan Elections Commission for its professionalism in ensuring a peaceful and credible poll.
Sri Lanka has experienced a spate of ethnic and sectarian attacks since its 26-year civil conflict, which pitted the Government against Tamil insurgents, ended in 2009.

Most recently, a tide of violence and recrimination against Sri Lanka’s Muslim and Christian communities by Buddhist groups with extremist views has threatened to divide the country once again.

**Security Council strongly condemns terrorist attack in northern Lebanon**

**11 January** - Outraged in the wake of an attack by Jahbat Al-Nusra which caused numerous deaths and injuries in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, the United Nations Security Council has strongly condemned the incident and expressed its determination to combat terrorism on all fronts.

In a press statement issued today in New York, Council members expressed their condolences to the families of the victims, as well as to the people and Government of Lebanon. They also wished a speedy recovery to those injured in the incident.

According to news reports, a suicide bomb attack on a cafe in the Lebanese city of Tripoli killed at least nine people and wounded dozens of others on Saturday. The Nusra Front, an Al-Qaida-affiliated terrorist group, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Reaffirming that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivation, the Council reiterated its determination to combat all forms of the scourge, in accordance with its responsibilities under the UN Charter.

The members of the Council went on to underlined the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice and urged all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with the Lebanese authorities in this regard.

In their statement the Council members reminded States that they must ensure that measures taken to combat terrorism comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law.

Reaffirming their full support for Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence the Council members recalled the presidential statements of 10 July 2013 and of 29 May 2014, and appealed to all Lebanese people to preserve national unity in the face of attempts to undermine the country's stability.

The Council also stressed the importance for all Lebanese parties to respect Lebanon's policy of disassociation and to refrain from any involvement in the Syrian crisis, consistent with their commitment in the Baabda Declaration.
UN condemns Boko Haram's 'depraved act' as child suicide bombers attack northern Nigeria market

11 January - Appalled by the escalating bloodshed at the hands of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria over the past week, capped by reports that suspected child suicide bombers attacked a crowded market in war-torn Borno state, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Anthony Lake, head of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), have both strongly condemned the terrorist group’s “depraved act.”

A statement issued today by his spokesperson in New York said that Mr. Ban is appalled by reports that hundreds of civilians have been killed around the town of Baga, Borno state, near Nigeria's border with Chad in the past week.

“The situation in Nigeria and the region remains at the top of the Secretary-General’s agenda,” said the statement, adding that just yesterday, it was reported that a 10-year old girl was used to detonate a bomb at a market in Maiduguri, also in Borno state, killing at least 19 people.

Utterly condemning the “depraved act at the hands of Boko Haram terrorists,” Mr. Ban underscored the readiness of the UN to assist the Nigerian Government and all affected neighboring States in bringing an end to the violence and to alleviate the suffering of civilians with all available means and resources.

For his part, UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake said in a separate statement: “These images from Northern Nigeria should be searing the conscience of the world.”

Deploring the reports that so many innocent children, women and elderly had been massacred in Baga, he noted specifically that young girls had been sent to die with a bomb strapped to their chests in Maiduguri. “And lest we forget, more than two hundred girls stolen from their families, still lost,” he added.

“Words alone can neither express our outrage nor ease the agony of all those suffering from the constant violence in northern Nigeria,” Mr. Lake declared, underscoring that the images of recent days and all they imply for the future of Nigeria should galvanize effective action. For this cannot go on.”

Just two days ago the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) reported that the number of Nigerian refugees seeking safety in Chad has almost quadrupled over the past 10 days after attacks by Boko Haram uprooted about 7,300 Nigerians, forcing them into western Chad, where most are staying with local communities in villages around 450 kilometres north-west of the capital, N'Djamena.

A spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said the 3 January attack on the town of Baga alone caused 3,400 people to flee to Chad.

“The Government of Chad has requested international assistance,” said the spokesperson. “The Chadian Government has sent a mission and a medical team to the areas and is providing food assistance and other basic supplies. Humanitarian agencies including OCHA, UNICEF, UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) are currently in the area assessing needs.”
UNESCO chief joins world leaders for historic unity march in wake deadly terrorist attacks in France

11 January - The head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Irina Bokova, participated in today's historic march for freedom and solidarity in Paris, held in the wake of the deadly terrorist assault on French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo on Wednesday, and after three days of subsequent attacks that killed 17 people in the country.

In a statement, the Director-General declared: “Beyond expressions of sympathy and solidarity, we must act. For UNESCO, this means, first, to continue supporting and advancing freedom of expression and of the press, fighting for the safety of journalists and against impunity.”

“We must bolster all our work in education, in promoting dialogue and understanding between cultures and religions,” Ms. Bokova goes on to say, underscoring that fanatical violence “reflects a perversion of the mind of its perpetrator, which can paralyze the thinking of those who are its victims, spreading fear, blocking all reasoning and facilitating simplistic assimilations.”

“As sectarian violence spreads through hate speech, through lies and the manipulation of religion, we must respond by fostering tools that enable young people to resist such manipulations, and this brings us back to the founding principle of UNESCO – since wars begin in the minds of men and women, we must build the defenses of peace in the minds of men and women.”

Press reports suggest that hundreds of thousands of people have poured onto the streets of Paris today amid heavy security in a massive show of unity and support. This follows the shocking attacks that began on Wednesday, 7 January, with a deadly assault by masked gunmen on the editorial staff at Charlie Hebdo, and two subsequent hostage takings at a Jewish supermarket in Paris, and a print shop northeast of the French capital. Ultimately, 17 people were killed.

The horrific events drew strong condemnation from across the United Nations system, including from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who declared that while the attack was meant to divide, “this is a moment for solidarity. Around the world, we must stand strong for freedom of expression and tolerance and stand against forces of division and hate.”

In a statement issued later in the day by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban, who is on an official visit to India, welcomed the march and renewed his condolences to the families of the victims of the attacks in France over the past week. Staffan de Mistura, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, represented the United Nations at the march and joined in expressing the Organization's revulsion for terrorism.

“He has been deeply moved by the images of today's march and the displays of global solidarity over the past few days,” said the statement, emphasizing the UN chief's strong commitment to the essential work of countering extremism, fighting anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination, and upholding the rights to freedom of speech and expression.

Calling in his statement for heightened efforts to promote tolerance and understanding, Mr. Ban said: “The world must address this violence and division in ways that do not exacerbate the problems and that ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law.” He also specifically warned against targeting Muslims for reprisals. “Such unwarranted bias would only play into the hands of terrorists and contribute to the spiral of violence,” the statement added.

According to UNESCO, today's unity march brought together nearly 50 heads of State and Government, including many political and religious leaders. Led by French President Francois Hollande, the march was also expected to include the leaders of Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Israel, Palestine and the United Arab Emirates.

In her statement, the Director-General reiterated the mandate and commitment of UNESCO in promoting freedom of
expression and defending a free, pluralistic and independent media. On behalf of the Organization, she expressed deep concern at such brutal sectarian violence, calling for unity and solidarity in response.

"The attack in Vincennes is criminal and anti-Semitic, featuring horrendous violence, following in the wake of the attacks of Toulouse and Brussels. Over the last few days, unspeakable attacks have taken place against Muslim places of worship and mosques have been desecrated."

Ms. Bokova said terrorists are seeking to divide society, to set communities against each other, “and we must prevent this at all cost. This is the significance of this march, and the meaning of my participation, on behalf of the United Nations, guided by this spirit of solidarity."

In India, Ban pledges UN commitment to Gandhi's vision of peace, tolerance, dignity for all

11 January - Growing radicalization, fundamentalism and extremism demand a renewed emphasis of Mahatma Gandhi's ideals – both spiritual and political, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in Gujarat today, pledging the ongoing commitment of the United Nations to promote tolerance, and ensure justice and dignity for all.

“Divisive politics and sectarian incitement have no place in our modern world. As Gandhi reminded us, 'There will be no lasting peace on earth unless we learn not merely to tolerate but even to respect the other faiths as our own,'” said Mr. Ban in remarks at Sbarmati Gandhi Ashram, which houses a library and museum chronicling the life, work, and teachings of the legendary leader of India's independence movement and pioneer of the philosophy and strategy of non-violence.

Indeed, continued the Secretary-General, there is great strength in diversity – and countries that celebrate diversity and embrace every single individual are the ones to shape a secure and stable world, and he looked to India – “a large, diverse and vibrant democracy – to be a champion of the rights, dignity and equality of all people.”

Mr. Ban said that like so many people around the world, he has long admired Mahatma Gandhi and has been personally guided by his teachings, especially his description of “Seven Social Sins”: politics without principles; wealth without work; pleasure without conscience; knowledge without character; commerce without morality; science without humanity; and worship without sacrifice.

“This vision transcends all borders. Gandhi’s compassion embraces all people. I myself have been putting in my best efforts and asking all leaders, far and wide, to live by his teachings,” said Mr. Ban, adding that Gandhi's emphasis on the poor is reflected today in the work of the United Nations to end poverty and build a peaceful world of dignity for all.

“We will succeed only if the memory of Gandhi's unyielding fight against injustice burns bright in our hearts,” he said, noting that the United Nations marks Gandhi’s birthday as the International Day of Non-Violence – “and we defend his ideals every day of the year.”

Touching on Gandhi's inspiring and enduring legacy, Mr. Ban said that he would never forget seeing well-worn copies of Gandhi's books at an exhibition of the papers of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “Nelson Mandela also deeply admired Gandhi. Mandela said Gandhi symbolized hope that when all South Africans are treated as equals, the country would be at peace.”

“The same holds true for our world,” said the Secretary-General, emphasizing: “Mahatma Gandhi preached and followed the message of peace, non-violence and communal harmony. It is a common value that the United Nations promotes and asks leaders near and far to put into practice – from here in Gujarat to the world.”

The ashram is one of the first stops on his three-day visit to India, and later in the day, as he addressed the 7th Vibrant Gujarat Summit, a bi-annual event that brings together political and business leaders, investors, and corporations, Mr. Ban expressed the hope that the participants and all the world's people would be inspired by Gandhi's vision and teachings.
He also stressed that 2015 must be a year for global action. “We must change course if we are to avoid even greater damage to ourselves and to our planet,” said Mr. Ban, explaining that like the gathered leaders, he too must emphasize the importance of his mandate, and, as UN Secretary-General, he must spotlight 2015 as “most important and crucial for humanity.”

This is because there are three important priorities that must be achieved during the year, which also marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations: making the final push to achieve the landmark UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); crafting a post-2015 development agenda with a set of sustainable development goals; and agreeing on a universal and meaningful climate change agreement in December in Paris.

With all this in mind, the Secretary-General said the world had a very important enabling factor that would help in reaching those objectives: the upcoming UN conference on financing for development, set to be held in July in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. That and other meetings throughout the year would aim at mutually reinforcing goals: to map out a new era of development that strengthens equity and fosters inclusive growth and climate action.

On the margins of the Summit, the Secretary-General met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Mr. Ban thanked India for its significant contribution to UN peacekeeping operations, as well as to the Organizations conflict prevention and humanitarian efforts. The two also discussed, among others, the need for action on climate change, the post-2015 development agenda, and regional issues.

The UN chief also met with United States Secretary of State John Kerry, and the two leaders discussed international peace and security issues, including UN efforts to address the crisis in Libya, the urgency of returning to negotiations to achieve a two state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the need for progress on nuclear disarmament of the Korean Peninsula.

Also today, Mr. Ban inaugurated in Gujarat the Canal Top Solar Power Plant, where, looking out over the massive facility, he said: “I saw more than glittering panels – I saw the future of India and the future of our world. I saw India’s bright creativity, ingenuity and cutting-edge technology. And I saw the leadership on sustainable development of Prime Minister Modi when he was the Chief Minister in Gujarat.”

Speaking to reporters, the UN chief commended India for having made significant strides in meeting MDG targets, particularly in lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, in eliminating polio, and in reducing child and maternal mortality. “But…we have to admit, that most of the developing countries have not fully accomplished the [Goals].”

“That's why the Member States are now very seriously working to find another set of goals, what we [call] the sustainable development goals. These…goals [are] aiming to address three dimensions of the world and our lives – the economic dimension, social dimension and environmental dimension. [They] cover all spectrums of our lives,” he said, noting that Member States are shortly set to begin final negotiations on the new targets in the months leading up to a major UN summit in September 2015.

**UN to host new round of talks among Libyan parties with view to ending crisis**

10 January - Libyan parties have agreed to hold in Geneva next week a new round of United Nations-facilitated political talks aimed at helping all sides reach “common ground” to end the current political and security crisis, the UN Mission in the strife-torn country announced today.

The primary objective of the meeting, which will be hosted by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) at the United Nations Office at Geneva, will be to reach agreement on the management of the remainder of the transitional period, including the formation of a unity government that enjoys wide support, and pave the way for a stable environment for the constitutional process in which a new permanent constitution can be adopted.
In a press statement, UNSMIL noted that the discussions between the Libyan stakeholders will also seek to put in place the necessary security arrangements in order to bring an end to the armed hostilities raging in different parts of the country.

The agreement to hold the next round of dialogue comes after wide-ranging and intensive consultations with the parties by UNSMIL chief Bernardino León over the past several weeks. To create a conducive environment for the dialogue, Mr. León has proposed to the parties to the conflict a “freeze” in military operations for a few days.

As fighting between armed factions continued to rattle the war-weary North African nation, Mr. León warned just days ago that time was running out, and the longer efforts to tackle the crisis are delayed, the more difficult it would be to reach a solution to end the fighting, restore political and State institutional unity and revive the economy.

Emphasizing that the political dialogue process is Libyan-led, and that the Mission's facilitating role is to help in the search for common ground, UNSMIL stressed today that this new dialogue “is an important opportunity for the Libyans to restore stability and prevent the country's slide towards deeper conflict and economic collapse that should not be missed.”

The Mission urged the main stakeholders to approach the fresh talks with courage and determination and put the national interest above all other considerations in this critical juncture in the country's political transition, “abiding by the democratic principles of the 17th of February revolution that united the Libyan people and also united the international community in support of Libya.”

Libya's civil war began in 2011 and resulted in the ouster of late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.