Nearly 800,000 children forced to flee violence in Nigeria and region – UNICEF

13 April - A new report released by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reveals that at least 800,000 children have been forced to flee their homes as a result of the conflict in northeast Nigeria between Boko Haram, military forces and civilian self-defence groups.

Released a year after 200 girls were abducted in Chibok, UNICEF’s Missing Childhoods reveals that the number of children running for their lives within Nigeria, or crossing over the border to Chad, Niger and Cameroon, has more than doubled in just less than a year.

“The abduction of more than 200 girls in Chibok is only one of endless tragedies being replicated on an epic scale across Nigeria and the region,” says Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa. “Scores of girls and boys have gone missing in Nigeria – abducted, recruited by armed groups, attacked, used as weapons, or forced to flee violence. They have the right to get their childhoods back.”

The Missing Childhoods report outlines how the conflict is exerting a heavy toll on children in Nigeria and across the region in an increasing number of ways. As well as being killed, maimed and displaced, children are being used within the ranks of Boko Haram – as combatants, cooks, porters and look-outs.

Young women and girls are being subjected to forced marriage, forced labour and rape, while students and teachers are being deliberately targeted. More than 300 schools were damaged or destroyed and at least 196 teachers and 314 schoolchildren killed by the end of 2014.
In response to the crisis, UNICEF has stepped up its humanitarian response over the past six months, providing over 60,000 children affected by the conflict in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad with counselling and psychosocial support to help them ease the pain of their memories, reduce stress and cope with emotional distress.

The agency is also working with partners to provide safe water and life-saving health services, to restore access to education by creating temporary learning spaces, and to deliver therapeutic treatment to malnourished children.

In order to maintain its relief efforts in Nigeria and neighbouring countries, UNICEF is urging international donors to ramp up their financial support, as the agency is facing a severe funding shortfall. It has received only 15 per cent of the $26.5 million required for its humanitarian response in Nigeria for 2015, and no more than 17 per cent of its appeal for Cameroon, 2 per cent for Niger and one per cent for Chad.

UNICEF has released its report at the same time as it makes efforts to draw attention to the devastating impact of the conflict on children across the region using the hashtag #bringbackourchildhood. As part of that drive, UNICEF is using Snapchat – a social platform where messages appear briefly – to highlight the plight of the hundreds of thousands of children who are missing out on their childhoods as a result of the conflict.

To tell the stories of the children who have fled the violence, UNICEF and leading Snapchat artists will share images based on drawings made by children in Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon. The artwork reflects what children miss from home and the emotional wounds and suffering they have endured, including seeing their parents and siblings killed, tortured or abducted.

**Doha: UN officials spotlight equal access to justice in promoting inclusive economic development**

13 April - The role fair, transparent and accessible legal frameworks play in poverty eradication – and in promoting sustainable development – was highlighted today by General Assembly President Sam Kutesa and other top United Nations officials told the UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, in Doha, Qatar today.

“Equal access to justice and non-discriminatory laws help advance gender equality and promote equitable and inclusive development. Furthermore, fighting corruption will make funds available for delivery of basic services to citizens, particularly to the most vulnerable,” Mr. Kutesa said at a high-level special event on the rule of law, human rights and the post-2015 agenda.

“Nurturing and promoting rule of law and human rights for all without discrimination is critical for reducing violence and crime, and ensuring human security. Central to this is the need for effective and accountable security and justice systems to address cycles of violence and to promote peace and stability, which are important pre-requisites to sustained economic growth,” he added.

The high-level special event was organized by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in partnership with the Rule of law coordination and resource group, as well as Italy and Thailand. The UN Crime Congress opened Sunday and is expected to conclude on 19 April.

Today’s discussion “is an important follow-up to the General Assembly’s high-level thematic debate on ‘Integrating crime prevention and criminal justice in the post-2015 development agenda,’ which was held in New York on 25 February 2015,” said UNODC Executive Director, Yury Fedotov.

Mr. Kutesa stressed that the nature of crime has changed. “Many countries are today grappling with national and transnational crimes like human, firearms and drug trafficking; corruption; smuggling of migrants; counterfeit medicines; cybercrime and piracy. These not only undermine national capacities towards effective rule of law and human rights promotion, but also weaken the ability of countries and communities to prosper and realize development opportunities,” he added.
The President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Martin Sajdik, the Assistant Secretary-General for the Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Dmitry Titov, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ivan Šimonović, also spoke at today’s high-level event.

Mr. Sajdik said “there is no good governance, without rule of law, and there is no rule of law without good governance,” and added, “the promotion of sustainable development, guarded by strong rule of law and human rights, is a road that must be taken by everyone.”

“If we wish to secure peaceful and stable societies, and true social development, then eradicating discrimination, fighting inequalities between social groups, and ensuring that ‘no one is left behind’ should be our urgent priority,” Mr. Šimonović said.

He also stressed that “law enforcement and the administration of justice must be consistent with international human rights law.” “Laws should serve people, reflecting their values and needs and not be imposed on them. We need ‘rule of law,’ not a ‘law and order’ approach. Where law enforcement is discriminatory, and disproportionately harsh, and where the laws themselves are unjust, this generates both resentment and inequality,” he added.

Mr. Šimonović stressed that “to be truly transformative, and effective, the new post-2015 development agenda must be firmly based on international human rights law, aiming to secure freedom for fear and want for all, without discrimination.”

Mr. Titov said that it is not just violent crime that hinders development. “There is a wealth of evidence, as mentioned by many today, that corruption is a major hindrance with a disproportionate impact on the poor and marginalized,” he said.

He gave examples of initiatives by the Department of peacekeeping operations to strengthen the rule of law, including “helping the authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to deal with military officers accused of committing crimes against civilians” and “supporting Côte d’Ivoire in operationalizing all 37 courts and rehabilitating 22 prisons across the country following the 2011 crisis.”

Yarmouk crisis: international community has ‘compelling imperative to act,’ says UN official

13 April - The thousands of Palestinian and Syrian refugees trapped in the Yarmouk refugee camp have suffered “untold indignities” amid intensifying hostilities between armed groups in the area, the United Nations agency concerned with the well-being of Palestinian refugees declared today.

“We can all agree that peaceful options for resolving the Yarmouk crisis will provide the optimal solution right now for the protection of the civilians,” Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), said during the second day of his visit to the Syrian capital, Damascus, where Yarmouk is located.

“I call on all sides to respect the beleaguered civilians trapped inside Yarmouk,” he added.

Since 1 April, Yarmouk has been the scene of intense fighting between a number of armed groups, reportedly including elements of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), rendering it virtually impossible for civilians to leave.

Among Yarmouk’s 18,000 besieged residents are also 3,500 children, who have been reliant on UNRWA’s intermittent distributions of food and other assistance for over a year. In some areas, interruptions of humanitarian operations have left thousands of people without aid for months.

Over the weekend, Mr. Krähenbühl visited Damascus to get a sense of the situation at the Yarmouk camp, hear from refugees affected by the crisis, and consult with leaders on funnel aid to people in need.
In his statement released earlier today, he reiterated the need to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to the civilians inside the refugee camp and added that his meeting with officials from the Syrian Government had offered “some grounds for optimism.”

“Howver there is much more work that needs to be done and I shall be following up today with senior government counterparts on the issue of humanitarian access,” the UN official admitted.

Pointing to his personal interactions with refugees affected by the crisis in Yarmouk, the UNRWA chief said he was “deeply moved” by the tales of those who had been forced to flee fierce fighting in and around the camp and whose resilience and dignity were “truly humbling.”

“It is the human dimension that must motivate the international system at every level and which provides the most compelling imperative to act,” Mr. Krähenbühl concluded.

“The Syria conflict has a human face. These are individuals with a dignity and destiny that must be at the centre of our responses as we grapple with the complexities of protecting civilians, in Yarmouk and beyond.”

UNESCO condemns destruction at Iraq’s Nimrud site

13 April - The United Nations agency mandated with protecting heritage sites worldwide today denounced further destruction at the archaeological site of Nimrud in Iraq, calling the deliberate damage of culture a “war crime” and pledging to do everything possible to fight it.

"I condemn this mad, destructive act that accentuates the horror of the situation. It confirms that the terrorists are not only destroying representations of figures and bas-reliefs,” said the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Irina Bokova, in a a in a statement to the press.

“With their hammers and explosives they are also obliterating the site itself, clearly determined to wipe out all traces of the history of Iraq’s people,” she added, expressing her solidarity with the people of Iraq.

The Director-General recalled UNESCO’s action to protect heritage and coordinate the efforts of the international community in the struggle against illicit traffic of cultural goods.

“We will do everything possible to fight against this and document it, to ensure that those responsible are identified and brought to justice,” Ms. Bokova said. “The deliberate destruction of heritage is a war crime.”

UNESCO denounced the attack against Nimrud on 6 March. Last weekend’s video shows the total destruction of the north-west part of the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II, along with stone sculptures from the neo-Assyrian era. Situated 32 kilometres south of Mosul, the Palace was built dated back to 879 B.C., when Nimrud, then known as Kalhu, served as the capital of the Assyrian Empire.

“The propaganda and hatred that underlies these acts, and which is circulating via the internet, demands in response messages of peace and knowledge of history. UNESCO supports all those – in Iraq and elsewhere – who are mobilizing to explain the importance of this heritage and why nothing justifies its destruction,” Ms. Bokova said.

“This message needs to be heard, and I invite political and religious leaders along with civil society to support the #Unite4Heritage campaign launched recently by UNESCO, and to speak out against these crimes via all possible channels,”
she added.

UNESCO is currently working closely with the Government of Iraq, neighbouring states and the full range of its other partners, to safeguard this millennial heritage.

**UN agency unveils new online tool to reduce risks to aircraft in conflict zones**

**13 April** - The United Nations International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has launched a new website issuing warnings about risks to aircraft in conflict zones, which aims to serve as a single source for up-to-date assessments from States and relevant international organizations to reduce risks to civil aviation arising from armed conflict.

“The new repository is accessible via ICAO’s public website homepage for representatives from States, airlines and the general public,” the agency said in a press release. “As it becomes populated with submissions, it will provide up-to-date information on potential risks to civil aviation arising from armed conflict.”

The move comes in direct response to recommendations made in February by Member States at ICAO’s 2015 High-Level Safety Conference in Montreal, Canada.

Under the Chicago Convention, each State is responsible for assessing civil aviation conflict zone risks in their territories, and for making that information promptly available to other States and airlines.

“Only authorized State officials will have the right to submit risk information under the procedures agreed to by the ICAO Council,” according to the press release. “In all cases, the identity of the State submitting information to the repository will be clearly indicated, and States being referenced in a risk submission will also have the opportunity to review and approve the related information prior to public posting.”

ICAO, a specialized UN agency tasked with coordinating and regulating international air travel, sets rules of airspace, aircraft registration and safety, and undertakes compliance audits, performs studies and analyses.

At its February High-Level Conference, ICAO’s member States Member States recommended the adoption of a 15-minute aircraft tracking standard that the agency applauded at the time as an important first step in providing a foundation for global flight tracking.”

Concerns over aircraft tracking and risks to civil aviation arising from conflict zones were brought to the fore in the wake of the 2014 downing of a Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine, and the disappearance of another Malaysian Airlines flight upon take off from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
UN Postal Conference aims to begin work on new global strategy reflecting new challenges, opportunities

13 April - In a message delivered today to delegates at the World Strategy Conference for the United Nations postal agency, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon underlined the essential role to be played by postal services in global efforts to build a sustainable future.

“As the world shapes a new sustainable development agenda and strives to address the threat posed by climate change, postal services can and must be part of the solution,” said Mr. Ban. “Postal administrations offer essential communications and logistical support. They provide important financial services and make other contributions to social advancement and human well-being.”

In an introductory message to the Conference, wrapping up tomorrow, he looked forward to commencement of the process of drafting the next world postal strategy for the Universal Postal Union (UPU), which will be delivered at the Universal Postal Congress in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2016, and he said he hoped delegates would grasp the opportunity to consider what could be done to help improve the lives of people all over the world.

The Conference seeks to take stock of the UPU’s current four-year roadmap – the 2012 Doha Postal Strategy – and discuss the issues and trends that will shape the organization’s future blueprint. The UPU’s chief, Bishar Hussein urged the 750 delegates attending the Conference to take a critical look at how postal services are created and delivered and to consider how the 21st Century is forcing public postal services to redefine themselves.

“Let’s step out of our comfort zone and test new ideas upon which we can build the future of the Post,” he said as he launched the discussions. “The roadmap that guides our actions and decisions reflects the global postal environment, an environment marked by profound changes and tipping points representing both challenges and opportunities for the postal sector.”

Traditional mail has declined in importance for postal services in recent years, while logistics and financial services have grown in importance. E-commerce has boomed and parcel volumes have increased, too, fuelled by changing consumer behaviours, brought about by new technological applications.

“The modern consumer is digital, concerned with sustainable development, and has a totally different gauge for the value of a product or service,” said Hussein. “Clients today want to access services anywhere, any time. They want products tailored to their preferred method of consumption, and they want those products to be delivered at home.”

Letter-post volumes have traditionally accounted for the bulk of postal revenues but in 2013 they dipped below 50 per cent of total revenues for the biggest 20 Posts in the world. In addition, UPU data shows that Posts are increasingly handling more merchandises than documents, an indication of the impact of e-commerce on the postal business. The Director-General underlined the importance of seeing the new reality as an exciting opportunity, rather than as a constraint.

“E-commerce, the digitization of financial services, new mobile payment solutions and big postal data are all major assets that position the postal sector at the heart of the technological revolution,” said Mr. Hussein.

Posts must explore new delivery models to meet customers’ expectation to receive their goods when and where they want them, especially as business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce is expected to generate $2.4 billion in 2018.

Among the 135 UPU member countries are represented at the Strategy Conference are 20 ministers as well as many regulators, postal executives, leaders of labour, trade and migration organizations and representatives of United Nations and other international organizations.

Established in 1874, the Universal Postal Union (UPU) has its headquarters in Berne, Switzerland’s capital. It is the world’s...
second oldest intergovernmental organization and has been a United Nations specialized agency since 1948.

**In Algeria, UN envoy opens latest round of talks between Libyan leaders, activists**

13 April - Libyan stakeholders must give the country’s United Nations-facilitated peace process a chance in order for a political solution to take hold and end the ongoing fighting in the North African nation, the head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has declared.

“We are here today to send a strong message that no more Libyans should be killed. No more Libyans should lose their lives,” Special Representative of the Secretary General for Libya and head of UNSMIL, Bernardino León said today in his opening remarks to the latest meeting of Libyan political leaders and activists held in Algeria.

“There must be a possibility for all Libyans to live together.”

The meeting is a follow-up to an earlier one that took place in March during which participants expressed strong support for dialogue as the way to resolve Libya's crisis peacefully. Past sessions have brought together representatives of Libyan municipalities and local councils in Geneva in January and in Brussels last month. The talks are aimed at including wide segments of Libyan society in the peace process.

Addressing those gathered at today’s meeting, Mr. Leon admitted that while reaching an agreement would prove to be “very challenging” and require “generosity and determination” on behalf of the participants, full acceptance of divergent views remained “the essence of democracy” and the key to Libya’s future.

“Only those who are against democracy, who are for extremism, are excluding themselves,” he added. “We will all of us have to give up a little bit to achieve agreement.”

A meeting that brings together tribal personalities will convene at a later date in Egypt. The UN Mission in the country is also reaching out to military, security and armed groups leaders.

Meanwhile, Mr. Leon today also expressed solidarity with the Republic of Korea and Morocco following a series of attacks against the two countries’ embassies in Tripoli over the weekend and which resulted in at least two deaths. According to the press, the attacks are reportedly linked to militants tied to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

**Doha: UN conference stresses grave need to combat wildlife crime**

13 April - With wildlife and forest crimes on the rise, yielding enormous profits for criminal networks, United Nations high-level officials at a major anti-crime meeting under way in Doha, Qatar, stressed the gravity of the scourge, saying that it fuels violence, corrupts supply chains and undermines the rule of law.

“Wildlife and forest crime…has the potential, not only to devastate the environment, but also to undermine the social, political and economic well-being of societies, while generating billions of dollars for criminal gangs and sustaining their illicit activities,” General Assembly President Sam Kutesa told a high-level event held as part of the 13th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

Wildlife and forest crime includes the taking, trading, importing, exporting, processing, possessing, obtaining and consumption of flora and fauna (animals, birds, fish, plants and trees) in contravention to national and international law.
The impact of the crime is global, but wildlife and forest crime is particular acute in developing countries as under-resourced governments often lack the capacity to regulate the exploitation of their natural resources.

In 2013 alone, some 20,000 African elephants were slaughtered. In the same year, more than 1,000 rhinos were killed on the continent.

The total value of the illegal trade in wood-based products, usually from and within East Asia and the Pacific, is worth an estimated $17 billion.

“We now, for the first time, have the opportunity to draw the attention of this Congress in its 60th year to the need to treat wildlife crime as a serious crime,” said the Secretary-General of the Convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora (CITES), John Scanlon, also at the event.

“It is because the scale and nature of illegal wildlife trade have changed over recent years and so must the global response. And it is responding but more clearly needs to be done,” he added.

Mr. Scanlon said that illegal wildlife trade is not about local subsistence poaching. Today, the world is confronted by transnational organized criminal gangs, and in some cases, rebel militia and rogue elements of the military. They are driving industrial scale poaching and illegal trade for illicit offshore markets.

“This has changed the dynamic of combating this highly destructive criminal activity in particular as it relates to some mega fauna, such as the African elephant and high value flora such as rosewood. But it also threatens many lesser known species, such as the pangolin”, he added.

The Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Yury Fedotov, said inadequate legislative frameworks remain “far too commonplace.”

Simply bringing wildlife crime cases to court is a challenge, he said, and this hard work is too easily undone when cases files are poorly prepared and investigations weak.

“Even when criminal traffickers are successfully prosecuted, the sentences imposed are often inadequate – small fines, a few months’ imprisonment or conditional sentencing”, he stressed.

All countries “must treat wildlife and forest crime as a serious criminal offence,” he added. “By guaranteeing a four-year sentence or more severe penalty, we can ensure that penalties are commensurate and can serve as a deterrent.”

He said that there is a need to apply the techniques that are known to be effective in fighting organized crime networks generally: intelligence sharing and undercover operations, addressing corruption risks, going after the money and tracking illegal goods to their destinations.

“Finally, we must make the development of alternative livelihoods a priority, to support the communities, in some countries, hurt most by this crime. In brief, a balanced approach, addressing supply and demand, in a spirit of shared responsibility, is needed”, he added.

The UN Crime Congress opened Sunday and is expected to conclude on 19 April.
Senior official stresses link between demographic shifts and UN development, climate priorities

13 April - As United Nations Member States met today in New York to begin the 48th session of the Commission on Population and Development, the head of the UN office dealing with economic and social affairs underlined the importance of the link between population changes and the Organization’s current development priorities.

“The year 2015 offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to achieve transformational global change,” said Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, in opening remarks to the Commission’s current session, which runs at UN Headquarters through the end of the week.

“In our world of stark and destabilizing inequality, where hundreds of millions of people struggle against assaults on their human dignity, we must honour our promise to leave no one behind,” he added.

Mr. Wu looked forward to a session that would contribute further to realizing the rights and worth of every individual and protecting the environment for generations to come.

“You meet as the international community strives this year to forge a set of sustainable [development] goals and a meaningful new universal climate agreement,” he said. “These twin priorities will be influenced by the profound demographic shifts taking place in our world, especially those related to youth, the elderly, urbanization and migration.”

As the world’s population of young people reached its highest in history, one of those shifts being felt by many countries was the ‘youth bulge,’ which, if handled properly, could allow those States to reap a demographic dividend.

“This requires enhancing education for both girls and boys, ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health care, and creating more decent jobs,” said Mr. Wu.

While the youth population was indeed expanding, the Under-Secretary-General added that the fastest growing age group worldwide was comprised of people aged 60 and over. That meant that workforces were shrinking and populations greying, and it made it necessary to forge societies where older persons can contribute to the fullest and enjoy the social protections they deserve.

He looked also to increasing urbanization, the benefits of which needed to be optimized, and he stressed the need to create conditions for safe, orderly and regular migration.

“Far too many migrants suffer from exploitation, discrimination and xenophobia,” he said. “Addressing these violations of their rights will empower migrants to increase their contributions to development in both countries of origin and destination.”
On Human Space Flight Day, UN spotlights the need to advance boundaries of exploration

12 April - Marking International Day of Human Space Flight, the United Nations today spotlighted the contribution of space science and technology to sustainable development and underscored the need to push the boundaries of exploration for the benefit of all people.

“I am confident that the International Day of Human Space Flight will remind us of our common humanity and our need to work together to conquer shared challenges,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on the Day marked worldwide on 12 April.

“I hope it will also inspire young people in particular to pursue their dreams and move the world towards new frontiers of knowledge and understanding,” the UN chief added.

In 2011, the General Assembly declared 12 April International Day of Human Space Flight to reaffirm the important contribution of space science and technology in achieving sustainable development. The Assembly also expressed interest in promoting and expanding the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes.

This day, 12 April back in 1961 was the date of the first human space flight, carried out by Yuri Gagarin, a Soviet citizen. This historic event opened the way for space exploration.

“Yuri Gagarin's journey as the first human in space 54 years ago has inspired us all to advance the boundaries of exploration”, said United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) Director, Simonetta Di Pippo.

To mark the day, UNOOSA has launched the fourth edition of its 'Messages from Space Explorers', a collection of messages from Space Explorers serving as a memorabilia of their contribution and inspiration to future generations.

“Recording the messages of the many men and women who have travelled into space allows us to commemorate the role these people have played as Ambassadors for humankind,” said Ms. Di Pippo.

The new edition – available on UNOOSA’s website in six different languages - contains messages from space explorers from France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United States. One of the featured explorers, Scott Kelly is currently on a one year mission aboard the International Space Station (ISS), which started on 28 March 2015.

The autograph album also contains a copy of the signed sheets received from 57 other space explorers from 20 nations, among which Valentina Tereshkova of Russia, the first woman in space, and Charles F. Bolden, the current NASA Administrator, and copy of the autographs of Yuri Gagarin, and Edward H. White, the first American to walk in space.
Afghan civilian casualties from ground combat rise in 2015 – UN

12 April - In the first three months of 2015, civilian casualties from ground engagements rose by eight per cent compared to the same period last year, according to the latest figures released today by the United Nations with warning that the toll is likely to rise in the coming summer months.

The numbers were released today by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which found that ground fighting between Pro-Government Forces and Anti-Government Elements caused 521 civilian casualties – that is 136 civilians killed and 385 injured.

Most of the casualties are caused by 'Anti-Government Elements' (73 per cent), with 'Pro-Government Forces' responsible for just under a quarter (14 per cent). Following the release of the latest figures, UN officials in the country called on all parties but especially the Taliban to “cease attacks against people who are not taking a direct part in hostilities.”

“The parties in particular should refrain from using mortars and rockets in any areas populated by civilians,” Nicholas Haysom, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, urged in a statement to the press.

Between 1 January and 31 March, UNAMA documented 266 civilian casualties (62 deaths and 204 injured) from mortars and rockets, up 43 per cent from the same period last year and accounting for half of civilian casualties from ground engagements.

Calling the spike in casualties a “seasonal resumption of higher levels of conflict-related violence,” Mr. Haysom, along with his colleagues at the Mission, expressed concern over the impact on civilians of further conflict-related operations between Government and Anti-Government forces in the next several months.

“With all signs pointing to increased ground conflict in the coming months, with devastating consequences for civilians, parties must act urgently on the commitments they’ve made to prevent harm to civilians, especially women and children,” Georgette Gagnon, Director of Human Rights for UNAMA, said today.

Ms. Gagnon also pointed out that women and child casualties have surpassed the unprecedented levels recorded in 2014. Women casualties increased 15 per cent compared to the first three months of 2014. Conflict-related violence killed 55 women and injured 117 and 123 children and injured 307.

“The consequences of the conflict go far beyond the horrific loss of life and injury to civilians. Conflict-related violence also devastates Afghan families through displacement, loss of livelihood, destruction of homes and other losses,” she said.

After ground engagements, Improvised Explosive Devices or IEDs were the second leading cause of civilian casualties in the first quarter of 2015, with 155 deaths and 275 injured. Targeted killings, the third cause, increased by 34 per cent in the first three months of 2015, with UNAMA documenting 309 civilian casualties.

The Taliban has claimed responsibility for 48 incidents of targeted killings, including deliberate killings of tribal elders, judges, prosecutors and civilian Government workers.

“The UN notes that direct attacks on civilians are strictly prohibited under international law which binds all parties to the conflict and may amount to war crimes,” said Ms. Gagnon.
Casualties caused by suicide attacks remained on par with 2014 levels with 55 deaths and 213 injuries. Civilian casualties from aerial operations by international military forces declined 42 per cent compared to the first quarter of 2014, with seven civilian deaths and eight injuries.

Total civilian deaths and injuries in the first quarter of 2015 followed the record high levels of 2014. Between 1 January and 31 March, UNAMA documented 655 deaths and 1,155 injuries.

**Human rights, rule of law vital for sustainable development, Ban tells UN Crime Congress**

12 April - Kicking off the 13th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Doha, Qatar, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon along with several other top UN officials today spotlighted the critical connection between rule of law and sustainable development.

“All societies need fair criminal justice systems, effective, accountable institutions, and access to justice for all,” Mr. Ban said in his keynote address at the opening ceremony of the Crime Congress.

“Accountable security services can go a long way toward ending cycles of violence. Strengthening legal rights helps address inequalities,” he added.

“There can be no sustainable development without human rights and the rule of law,” the Secretary-General continued.

Hundreds of policymakers and practitioners in the area of crime prevention and criminal justice, as well as experts from academia, representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, specialized agencies and other UN entities, and media are attending the forum, which is held every five years.

The Doha Crime Congress, running through 19 April, was opened by the Prime Minister of Qatar, Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani. The Congress takes place several months ahead of a major summit on the future global development agenda, scheduled to take place at UN Headquarters in September.

The Crime Congress today adopted the 'Doha Declaration', a political document emphasizing important aspects of fighting transnational organized crime and strengthening criminal justice systems and crime prevention.

“This September, Member States will consider a post-2015 development agenda that can pave the way to a better future for billions of people,” Mr. Ban said. “Success requires that the new agenda and sustainable development goals reflect the centrality of the rule of law.”

The Secretary-General called international cooperation and coordination critical, particularly in areas such as combating transnational organized crime and terrorism.

“I encourage every country to ratify and implement the conventions against drugs, crime and corruption, and the international instruments against terrorism, and to support the important and varied work of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime,” he added.

“We must also adapt to changing times. Cybercrime has now become a business which exceeds billions of dollars a year in online fraud, identity theft, and lost intellectual property. It affects millions of people around the world, as well as businesses and governments.”

During the ceremony, three representatives of the Youth Forum, which took place before the Congress, delivered to the participants the Doha Youth Forum statement, which includes their recommendations on the main themes that will be discussed at the Congress.
General Assembly President Sam Kutesa said that the Crime Congress is “an important forum to focus on crimes affecting the ability of millions of people around the world to realize a life of prosperity and dignity”.

Mr. Kutesa called on participants “to use this forum to generate concrete ideas that can positively contribute to the on-going negotiating process for the post-2015 development agenda in the area of crime prevention and criminal justice”.

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) President Martin Sajdik and UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Executive Director Yury Fedotov also delivered remarks at the opening of the Congress.

“We are all gathered here to further advance our united response to crime,” Mr. Sajdik said. “Although planned already years ago the timing of our congress cannot be better. After the Sendai Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction of last March our congress here is another landmark meeting in this absolutely crucial year for global development.”

Mr. Fedotov said that the meeting offers a timely opportunity to further advance global action, and promote a holistic approach that integrates effective crime prevention and criminal justice measures into the wider UN agenda, including work on gender equality and the protection of children.

“The Congress is an excellent opportunity to extend and enhance international cooperation to counter transnational organized crime, terrorism and illicit financial flows, and to ensure that our responses are fast, smart and able to cope with new threats,” he added.

At a press conference later this afternoon, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon congratulated the Prime Minister of Qatar on the successful adoption of the Doha Declaration.

“I believe the Declaration to be implementable, concise and achievable,” he said.

“I expect the Conference to be action-driven. It should provide a platform for increased cooperation between governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society on the whole spectrum of crime prevention and criminal justice issues,” he added.

This year’s meeting - expected to conclude on Sunday, 19 April - marks the 60th anniversary of the Crime Congress.

**Libyan leaders, activists to meet under auspices of UN as crisis escalates in country’s west**

11 April - A meeting of Libyan political leaders and activists facilitated by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) will take place in Algeria tomorrow, 13 April, with hopes of devising a plan to end Libya's crisis, which is said to have 'gravely' escalated in the country's west.

“The role of political parties and political activists is important in lobbying the necessary support on all levels to achieve success for the dialogue and peace and stability for Libya,” said a statement released from UNSMIL today.

“This meeting is significant in that the leaders of political parties and activists will have the opportunity to analyse and enrich the documents that are being discussed,” it added.

Special Representative of the Secretary General for Libya and head of UNSMIL, Bernardino Leon is expected to update participants on the progress of the dialogue.

This meeting is a follow-up to an earlier one that took place March during which participants expressed strong support for dialogue as the way to resolve Libya's crisis peacefully. Past meetings have brought together representatives of Libyan municipalities and local councils in Geneva in January and in Brussels last month. The talks are aimed at including wide
segments of Libyan society in the peace process.

“Dialogue is an opportunity for Libyans to stop the bloodshed and put their country back on the road to stability and prosperity that should not be missed,” the Mission note also said.

A meeting that brings together tribal personalities will convene at a later date in Egypt. The UN Mission in the country is also reaching out to military, security and armed groups leaders.

The Mission also released a statement yesterday, condemning the grave escalation in hostilities in western Libya, particularly in the Aziziya area in Warshafana, where it said people are enduring immense hardship, with many displaced, abducted, tortured and in need of aid.

“The Mission urges all parties to take all necessary measures to ensure the right of return for all those displaced from the area, and that none are illegally detained and prosecuted outside the scope of the law,” it added, calling for an end to the fighting so that residents can resume their normal day-to-day living.

“The Mission also reiterates its warnings to the warring parties that the targeting of civilians could amount to crimes punishable under international humanitarian law,” the note also said.

All parties in Libya must refrain from taking any military actions that could constitute a provocation in the current environment of heightened tensions and compromise neutrality.

Later this afternoon, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon strongly condemned the attack on the embassy of the Republic of Korea in Tripoli, Libya by unidentified gunmen and sent his condolences to the families of the victims.

Mr. Ban recalled that the principle of inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises must be respected and expressed hope that the perpetrators of the attack will be swiftly brought to justice.

“The ongoing violence in Libya reminds us of the urgent need for Libyans to end the ongoing conflict, and to move quickly to agree on the formation of a national unity government,” Mr. Ban said in his statement.

To that end, he welcomed the resumption of Libya's political dialogue in the coming days.

**UN official ‘shocked’ by killing of aid workers in Afghanistan**

11 April - The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Afghanistan today expressed sadness for the death of five staff members of Save the Children International, found dead on 10 April, after being abducted on 3 March in Uruzgan province.

"I am deeply saddened by this shocking news. I share the grief of our colleagues at Save the Children International and the families of those killed,” Mark Bowden said in a statement to the press.

“Afghanistan is one of the most challenging places for the humanitarian community with death, kidnappings and attacks against humanitarians all too frequent an occurrence,” he added.

Aid workers in Afghanistan provide emergency trauma care, run feeding programmes for malnourished children, assist people displaced from conflict and natural disasters, and support the most vulnerable wherever there is need.

Attacks against aid workers lessen their ability to carry out these essential activities.
“I call on all parties to ensure that those providing humanitarian assistance have safe access to people in need and can carry out their life-saving work unhindered,” the Humanitarian Coordinator said.

In 2014, 57 aid workers were killed in Afghanistan, according to United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

**UN official on ‘urgent’ mission to besieged Yarmouk refugee camp**

11 April - The United Nations agency concerned with the well-being of Palestinian refugees is undertaking an urgent mission to Syria today, prompted by deepening concerns for the safety and protection of thousands Palestinian and Syrian civilians at Yarmouk refugee camp overrun in recent days by militants.

Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), is visiting Yarmouk to get a sense of the situation in the camp, hear from refugees affected by the crisis, and consult with leaders on how to get aid to people in need.

"Once again, I am deeply moved by the dignity of Palestine refugees in the face of adversity. More than ever UNRWA will stand by [them] in this most critical time," he said as he met with refugees.

Since 1 April, Yarmouk has been the scene of intense fighting between a number of armed groups, reportedly including elements of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), rendering it virtually impossible for civilians to leave.

Among Yarmouk’s 18,000 besieged residents are also 3,500 children, who have been reliant on UNRWA’s intermittent distributions of food and other assistance for over a year. In some areas, interruptions of humanitarian operations have left thousands of people without aid for months.

During his visit, Mr. Krähenbühl will consult with the Syrian Government and discuss a peaceful solution to addressing the humanitarian consequences of the situation in the camp. He will also consult several senior UN officials on ways to get humanitarian aid to civilians.

The Commissioner-General will also visit displaced people presently accommodated in a government school building in Tadamoun.