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Security Council renews commitment to landmark resolution on women, peace and security

13 October - Marking the 15th anniversary the adoption of the United Nations Security Council’s resolution 1325, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today declared his commitment to the inclusion of women in peace-building processes, while the Council adopted a new text by which it decided to integrate women, peace and security concerns across all country-specific situations on its agenda, within relevant contexts.

“Fifteen years ago, Security Council resolution 1325 underscored the pivotal link between gender and international peace and security,” said Mr. Ban in his opening remarks to the day-long meeting that was chaired by Mariano Rajoy Brey, the Prime Minister of Spain, which holds the Council’s presidency for the month of October.

“Since then, this Council has adopted several resolutions on women, peace and security – each of them a call to action for the international community,” added the Secretary-General.

In the new resolution adopted today, the Council recognized the ongoing need for greater integration of resolution 1325 in its own work, and, among other provisions, expressed its intention to dedicate periodic Council consultations on country situations, as necessary, to the topic of women, peace and security implementation, as well as the intention to ensure Security Council missions take into account gender considerations and the rights of women.

Citing his own commitment to implementing resolution 1325, the UN chief noted that he had appointed five women were now serving as his Special Representatives in peacekeeping missions, adding that he had also appointed the first-ever female Force Commander, Major General Kristin Lund, in Cyprus.
He also urged that the implementation of resolution 1325 “must be aligned with the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Mr. Ban then highlighted the three major reviews of UN peace operations, peacebuilding architecture and women, peace and security that had recently been conducted.

“One common theme has emerged: any reforms must include gender equality and women’s leadership as central ingredients, and must be strongly grounded in human rights,” he said.

He added that particular attention should be given to women who are the most vulnerable, particularly indigenous women.

“We must also do much more to combat the growing spread of violent extremism,” he continued. “Groups such as Da’esh [also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, of ISIL] and Boko Haram have mercilessly targeted women and girls,” said the Secretary-General, noting, for example, the systematic killings, torture, rape and sexual slavery by Da’esh against the Yazidi community may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. “We must ensure accountability.”

The Secretary-General also spoke of the restructuring of the gender architecture of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in headquarters and field missions, as well as the work of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to bolster the capacity of its gender team in Headquarters and to keep the engagement and participation of women in peacemaking.

The Department of Field Support (DFS), he continued, was working to implement strengthened measures to address sexual exploitation and abuse, and to increase the representation of women in peacekeeping, especially at the senior management level.

He also indicated his personal commitment to reach the target of 15 per cent of peacebuilding funds devoted to projects that address gender equality and the empowerment of women, and the expansion of this target in emerging areas of peace and security threats, particularly with regard to violent extremism.

Also addressing the meeting, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said “the voices of women leaders and frontline activists for peace are rare in this forum…but they are the most important voices you will hear today,” adding that vibrant women’s movements work tirelessly to realize justice and reconciliation.

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka highlighted the relevance of resolution of 1325, as well as “the very missed opportunities where it has not been put into effect, with dire cost.”

She went on to note the successes obtained in peace processes in Colombia and the Philippines because of the contributions of women in those processes.

Citing, the “growing body of evidence” showing that, to build peace, the “meaningful inclusion of women” is needed, she said: “This is the highest finding of the global study that informs this high-level review.” She also noted the importance of sustainable peace agreements and enhancing economic recovery after conflicts, as well as combatting violent extremism.

The global study, launched yesterday at UN Headquarters, highlights the need for more women in mediation support teams, as well as more regular consultation with civil society leaders, as well as more robust actions to combat sexual violence.

Speaking on behalf of civil society, Julienne Lusenge and Ms. Yanar Mohammed of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, addressed the Council, as did Ms. Alaa Murabit of the NGO Voice of Libyan Women.

Ms. Mohammed of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security and cofounder and President of Women’s Freedom in Iraq said that peace will “never be established” in Iraq and Syria without the proper implementation of resolution 1325.
She noted that ISIL arose from ongoing conflicts in Syria and Iraq, where the “rights of women, girls and LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender] persons and other marginalized groups were already degraded, leaving them open to abuse from ISIL,” adding that the situation in Iraq was now one that included the subjugation of women and the disenfranchisement of minority groups.

Ms. Mohammed also spoke of ISIL’s “enslavement of Iraqi women,” noting the particular example of the execution of 150 women in an ISIL-controlled area because they refused to obey the “so-called Islamic State.”

She said that research showed that “women’s meaningful participation” in peace processes was an effective tool to combat extremism, and that the inclusion of women in the Geneva peace process was critical to prevent resurgence of violent extremism.

“Extremism is not only an Iraqi or Syrian problem,” she said. “Lessons from our region must be applied globally,” adding that “what is primarily lacking is the political will.” Ms. Mohammed said that she urged the Security Council and the entire international community “to take action on its commitments.”

Dutch Safety Board’s final report on flight MH17 crash in Ukraine welcomed by UN

13 October - The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) today welcomed the Dutch Safety Board’s final report on Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, which crashed on 17 July 2014 in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine.

Known as an “accident investigation Final Report,” the document summarizes findings and provides recommendations on the technical investigation conducted under the international requirements established by the Convention on International Civil Aviation, also known as the Chicago Convention.

It concluded that the Boeing was “shot down over the eastern part of Ukraine, where an armed conflict broke out in April 2014,” killing all 298 people on board.

“ICAO and its Member States responded rapidly in the aftermath of MH17 to address some important immediate concerns,” said ICAO’s Council President, Dr. Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu, in a press release.

“Now that the Dutch Safety Board has issued its Final Report, ICAO will be reviewing its recommendations applicable to our Organization and responding as needed to ensure that air transport continues to be the safest way to travel,” he continued, noting that investigations under Annex 13 of the Chicago Convention are “directly related to improving flight safety, and not to the apportioning of liability or blame.”

The press release also highlighted that in the weeks immediately following the MH17 “tragedy,” ICAO quickly established a special Task Force on risks to civil aviation arising from conflict zones. The Task Force recommended that ICAO should establish an online repository where States could share their conflict zone information more effectively, and where the public could also access it. ICAO launched the new online tool in April of this year.

Additional Task Force recommendations included advice on risk assessment terminology, a comprehensive review of existing requirements and message formats, and industry led-initiatives to share operational information and be more transparent with passengers. ICAO has also reportedly begun work on agreed contingency flight routings for conflict zones under its regional air navigation planning groups.

Immediately after the accident, ICAO says its investigation specialists began assisting and providing technical Annex 13 consultations to the MH17 investigation, at the request of the States which instituted it. This reportedly included advice on the formal handover of investigation authority from Ukraine to the Netherlands.

“Any fatality is one too many in civil aviation,” stressed President Aliu. “Our sector is constantly improving its safety
performance through a wide range of collaborative global measures relating to data sharing and the strategic prioritization of flight safety risks, and accident investigation Final Reports play a very valuable part in that process.”

Meanwhile, the UN Secretary-General also welcomed the release of the final report, noting that it is in line with Security Council resolution 2166 (2014), which demands accountability, full access to the site of the crash, and a halt to military activities.

“The United Nations has from the very beginning fully supported and shared in the determination of the international community to ‘seek the truth about what happened,’” said Mr. Ban’s spokesperson.

The Secretary-General also once again paid tribute to the innocent victims who lost their lives on that “tragic day,” and said he shares in the need for full accountability, underlining that anyone found to be responsible must be brought to justice.

The Chicago Convention, which established 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.

Senior UN relief official urges action to address urgent humanitarian needs in Afghanistan and Pakistan

13 October - The head of Operations at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), John Ging, called today for renewed international commitment to address urgent humanitarian needs, and to shore up regional peace and stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan, noting that the two countries were on differing humanitarian trajectories.

Mr. Ging visited Afghanistan the day after the attack on the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Kunduz hospital, which killed 12 MSF works and 10 patients, including three children.

He noted that the fighting that had engulfed Kunduz in the days preceding the attack was symptomatic of the deteriorating security conditions in Afghanistan.

“Afghanistan faces a long and challenging road to peace, stability and development,” said Mr. Ging, speaking at a press conference in at UN Headquarters in New York today.

“But after thousands of lives lost and billions of dollars invested, it is imperative that we do not give up now. We must renew our commitment to supporting the people of Afghanistan on [the country’s] difficult road to recovery.”

According to OCHA, 7.4 million people in Afghanistan are in need of humanitarian assistance. Funding for the crisis has steadily decreased, and its current $204 million appeal is under 50 per cent funded.

Mr. Ging also visited Peshawar in Pakistan, where 600,000 people displaced by fighting since 2008 have returned to their villages this year.

“In a world where so many crises are on a negative trajectory, Pakistan offers an all too rare example of positive progress,” said Mr. Ging. “Supporting the Government to help people rebuild their lives in areas where fighting has ended is critical to building a stable and prosperous future for the country.”
13 October - Senior United Nations human rights officials today expressed their alarm at the rise in violent rhetoric – including calls for “holy war” against certain faiths – by influential religious leaders in relation to the situation in Syria.

The UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, Jennifer Welsh, condemned the recent call by clerics in Saudi Arabia for Sunni Muslims and their States to support a “holy war” against Shia Muslims and Christians in Syria, as well as against States and non-State armed groups perceived to support them.

“Such rhetoric can aggravate the already extremely volatile situation in Syria by drawing religiously motivated fighters to join all parties to the conflict, thus escalating the risk of violence against religious communities,” said the Advisers in a statement, adding that “advocacy of religious hatred to incite or justify violence is not only morally wrong, but also prohibited under international law.”

Mr. Dieng and Ms. Welsh also expressed concern at reports that Russian Orthodox clerics had referred to the Russian participation in the conflict in Syria as a “holy battle” against terrorism, as “statements of this kind can be manipulated, feed suspicion and increase polarization of communities.”

The Special Advisers also noted the response by Russian authorities, who reportedly denied that there was any religious connotation to their involvement in Syria.

They praised the organization Syrian Christians for Peace for rejecting the concept of a Christian “holy war” and condemning those who invoke it.

The Special Advisers called on States to dissociate themselves from and condemn any form of advocacy of religious hatred, promote dialogue and protect and empower all those religious figures and human rights defenders who are working towards enhancing interreligious respect and harmony.

The officials also called on religious leaders around the world to refrain from any form of advocacy of religious hatred and incitement to violence, and to counter any use of such rhetoric, emphasizing that “religious leaders should be messengers of peace, not of war.”

“In situations in which tensions are high, as in Syria, religious leaders should call for and foster restraint and dialogue, rather than fanning the flames of hatred,” they cautioned.
knowledge saves lives,’ UN stresses on International Day for Disaster Reduction

13 October - United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon today stressed the “indispensable” power of traditional, indigenous and local knowledge in his message on this year’s observance of the International Day for Disaster Reduction.

“Traditional and indigenous knowledge is the indispensable information base for many societies seeking to live in harmony with nature and adapt to disruptive weather events, a warming globe and rising seas,” Mr. Ban said in his message on the International Day.

The Secretary-General recalled a conversation he had earlier in the year with the President of Vanuatu at the opening of the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan. Vanuatu was at that time being hit hard by Cyclone Pam.

“The force of the storm led to expectations that there would be great loss of life. Thankfully, this was not the case. One reason was that cyclone shelters built in the traditional style from local materials saved many lives,” explained Mr. Ban.

“Resilience is the sum of many such acts of disaster risk reduction at the local level,” said the UN chief, noting in another example that the low-tech local knowledge in Cameroon passed down from generation to generation, helped farmers to cope with drought and protect their crop from pests.

Based on the impacts of climate changes in Arctic, which can expand to all humanity, the Secretary-General said: “Local knowledge of the impacts of urbanization, population growth, eco-system decline and greenhouse gas emissions is especially important in an era when more and more disasters are climate- and weather-related.”

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, said the Secretary-General, underlines how traditional knowledge can complement scientific knowledge in disaster risk management.”

He also said that building resilience to disasters is also a key feature of the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals, the framework that will guide our efforts to end poverty and promote shared prosperity on a healthy planet by 2030.”

Meanwhile, in her remarks, Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also mentioned that the Sendai Framework “campaigns for greater cooperation between governments, local authorities, communities and indigenous peoples in the formulation and implementation of policies and standards for natural disaster prevention.”

Ms. Bokova said the agency is committed to the widest possible dissemination of indigenous knowledge to meet the challenges of climate change and natural hazards, especially in remote areas.

The local shelters in Vanuatu had not only protected its people, according to UNESCO, “this traditional and indigenous knowledge also helps to protect the cultural heritage against natural hazards.”

She concluded her statement with calls for expanding on and integrating knowledge and expertise wherever they may be found. “It is the key to building societies that are all the more resilient when they are inclusive.”
UN global advocate Daniel Craig visits Cyprus, highlights need for continued de-mining efforts

13 October - In his new role as the United Nations Global Advocate for the Elimination of Mines and Explosive Hazards, renowned actor Daniel Craig underscored the humanitarian importance of the UN's de-mining efforts in Cyprus, his first country visit for the Organization.

“Witnessing the potential impact that mines can have on people and communities, years after the end of conflict, brings home the humanitarian importance of the UN's de-mining efforts in Cyprus,” Mr. Craig said.

Mr. Craig's mission led him on a two-day familiarization visit with the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), where he toured an active minefield – recently identified by the UN Mine Action Service.

He was also briefed on mine clearance activities by Lieutenant Sovannara Leang, who leads a twenty-strong team of Cambodian peacekeepers from the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The two UN forces are deployed together as part of an inter-mission co-operation agreement.

Having filmed years ago in Cambodia, the Global Advocate, best known for his role as 007 in the James Bond films was familiar with the widespread contamination of mines found in that country. Mr. Craig was impressed to see Cambodian de-miners offering their expertise to help the people and peace process in Cyprus as he witnessed first-hand the difficult and risky work in manual demining and explosive ordnance disposal by UN peacekeepers.

“For these peacekeepers to take their expertise, gleaned over the last 40 years in Cambodia, and make it available to the people of Cyprus, half-way around the world, is truly inspiring,” praised the James Bond actor.

Mr. Craig also visited an area recently cleared of mines in the UN buffer zone and the UN protected area in Nicosia, where he was briefed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of Mission, Lisa Buttenheim, and UNFICYP's Force Commander, Major General Kristen Lund.

“The fact that the UN Global Advocate chose to come to Cyprus for his first mission, at a time when demining demonstrates positive momentum in the peace process, is significant. His visit draws attention to the UN's long expressed goal of achieving a mine-free Cyprus for all,” said Ms. Buttenheim.

Over the last decade UN de-miners have removed more than 27,000 landmines from the buffer zone in Cyprus. A total of 74 minefields – or 9.7 square kilometres of land – have been cleared throughout the buffer zone to international mine action standards, set and monitored by the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS). The cleared area can now be put to productive use.

It is estimated today that thousands of landmines still remain in Cyprus, with large areas possibly still contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance.

“I very much hope that I will be the first and last Global Advocate to see landmines on this beautiful island,” said Mr. Craig.
UN mission ‘seriously concerned’ by Taliban threats against Afghan media outlets

13 October - Expressing serious concerns at recent statements made from the Taliban that identified specific Afghan media outlets and its staff as targets, the United Nations Assistance Mission in the country (UNAMA) today urged all parties to the conflict to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression.

“The work of journalists is critical in providing independent and accurate information about the ongoing conflict. Journalists must be guaranteed the highest degree of protection by State and non-state actors,” said the Mission said in a statement.

According to UNAMA, the Military Commission of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan issued a statement on 12 October condemning the reporting of Tolo TV and 1TV, declaring that they consider these television channels to be targets and not legitimate media outlets.

The Mission explains that according to international humanitarian law, Afghan journalists are not participants in the conflicts they cover and therefore, do not lose their status as civilians. The law also protects the right to freedom of expression of journalists. Additionally, it also explicitly prohibits attacks against civilians including acts of threats of violence aimed at terrorizing civilian population.

Expanding social protection offers a faster track to ending hunger – UN report

13 October - A new report published today by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) finds that social protection is emerging as a critical tool in the drive to eradicate hunger, yet the vast majority of the world’s rural poor are yet to be covered.

“It is urgent that we act to support the most vulnerable people in order to free the world of hunger,” said FAO’s Director-General José Graziano da Silva in a press release.

“Social protection programs allow households to access more food – often by increasing what they grow themselves – and also make their diets more diverse and healthier. These programs can have positive impacts on infant and maternal nutrition, reduce child labor and raise school attendance, all of which increase productivity,” he added.

The State of Food and Agriculture 2015 shows that in poor countries, social protection schemes – such as cash transfers, school feeding and public works – offer an economical way to provide vulnerable people with opportunities to move out of extreme poverty and hunger and to improve their children's health, education and life chances.

According to FAO, such programmes currently benefit 2.1 billion people in developing countries in various ways, including keeping 150 million people out of extreme poverty. Expanding such programs in rural areas and linking them to inclusive agricultural growth policies would rapidly reduce the number of poor people, the report says.

Meanwhile, the agency estimates that only about a third of the world’s poorest people are covered by any form of social protection. Coverage rates dip even lower in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, regions with the highest incidence of extreme poverty. Without such assistance, the report finds that many poor and vulnerable people will never have the opportunity to break out of the poverty trap – in which hunger, illness and lack of education perpetuate poverty for future generations.

FAO is highlighting that most countries, even the poorest, can afford some kind of social protection program. Globally,
some $67 billion a year in income supplements, mostly provided by social protection programs, would – along with other targeted pro-poor investments in agriculture – allow for the eradication of hunger by 2030. That is less than 0.10 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP).

In Zambia for example, a pilot cash-grants programme led recipient households to greatly increase livestock ownership as well as land under cultivation, input use and ownership of tools such as hoes, sickles and axes, leading to a 50 per cent jump in the overall value of locally produced agricultural commodities.

Beneficiaries also spent more on food, clothing and health-and-hygiene - an amount 25 per cent greater than the value of the initial transfer. The wider community also benefited through the increased demand for locally produced goods and services generated by the transfer-every dollar transferred generates an additional 79 cents in income, often for non-beneficiaries providing these goods and services.

At least 145 countries today reportedly provide one or more forms of social assistance, including unconditional cash transfers, meaning outright grants for eligible recipients, conditional cash transfers, usually linked to school attendance or health checkups and, public-works programs that offer guaranteed employment. Other forms include in-kind transfers, including food distribution and school feeding programs.

Furthermore, the report stresses that the notion of social protection reducing people's work effort is a myth. Rather, recipients often respond to social protection positively, including improving the nutrition and education of their children, relying more on home production rather than poorly paid wage work and also increasing their participation in existing networks such as funeral societies, a common form of risk management in many traditional communities.

Still, the report underlines how social protection alone cannot sustainably eradicate hunger and rural poverty. FAO therefore underscores the importance of combining and coordinating public investment in social protection with public and private investments in the productive sectors of agriculture and rural development. Such actions, it says, will ensure inclusive economic growth as a sustainable way to break the cycle of rural poverty.

The report was released ahead of World Food Day , which this year focuses on social protection’s role in breaking the cycle of rural poverty.

**UN agency condemns suicide attacks in Chad, pledges continued support**

**13 October** - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today deplored the violent and fatal suicide attacks that were carried out over the weekend in the western Chad town of Baga Sola.

“We are particularly concerned about the attack at the Kousseri site for internally displaced Chadians in Baga Sola that left at least 22 people dead in an area where UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies have been trying to help provide protection and assistance to tens of thousands of people displaced from their homes by the conflict with Boko Haram,” Leo Dobbs, UNHCR spokesperson said at the bi-weekly news briefing today in Geneva.

According to local and UN security reports, the suicide bombers, including three women and two children attacked the market and the Kousseri site for internally displaced people (IDPs) on the outskirts of Baga Sola on Saturday afternoon.

The attack in Baga Sola, the first on the town, came a day before female suicide bombers killed nine people in Kangaleri, northern Cameroon. The attacks left 47 people dead and dozens injured and those in critical condition were flown by helicopter to N’Djamena.

Mr. Dobbs added that UNHCR along with other agencies works 10 kilometres from Baga Sola, in the Dar Es Salam refugee camp.
“All our staff in the area and the 7,139 refugees from Nigeria and Niger in the camp are safe, but we have suspended travel to and within the Lake Chad region. UN flights are on standby to evacuate people or bring in emergency supplies," said Mr. Dobbs.

The UN agency welcomed the Government decision to improve security in the country following the attacks which revealed the vulnerability and isolation faced by refugees.

The spokesperson went on to note the harsh conditions of the displaced people, with many facing shortage of food, shelter and medical attention. Their makeshift shelters, some made with flimsy mosquito nets, provide little protection against insects or the elements during the current rainy season.

In recent weeks, UNHCR has been providing humanitarian assistance to over 60,000 internally displaced in the Lake area, including distributing vital non-food items to more than 32,800 people.

Besides aid distributions, the agency is assisting the Government by transporting food items from the capital for the displaced in the lake area, including rice, oil and sugar.

At present, Chad hosts over 438,000 refugees, including 350,000 Sudanese, 90,000 from Central African Republic and some 13,000 Nigerians.

“Many of these people were relocated from their island homes earlier this year as Lake Chad effectively became a war zone. Other agencies including MSF, WFP, UNICEF and the Red Cross Movement are also responding to the humanitarian needs of IDPs,” added Mr. Dobbs.

The agency reaffirmed its commitment to help the displaced in western Chad and urged the international community to support the country.

**Belarus election ‘neither free nor fair,’ says UN human rights expert**

13 October - The United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in Belarus, Miklós Haraszti, today said that while the Presidential polls conducted in the country this past Sunday were not met with violence as in previous cases, no progress was made in serving the Belarusians’ right to free and fair election.

“The election process was orchestrated, and the result was pre-ordained. It could not be otherwise, given the 20 years of continuous suppression of the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association, which are the preconditions for any credible competition,” Mr. Haraszti said in a press statement.

The Special Rapporteur noted that none of the international and local independent election monitors could verify the official claims of 86 per cent voter turnout or 84 per cent endorsement of the incumbent.

“Such high scores have never been claimed in elections in Europe since the end of the Soviet Union,” Mr. Haraszti stressed. “The observers’ documentations highlighted that not even the four days of coerced participation of prison inmates, army conscripts, and public servants under the label of ‘early voting,’ can give up the stated numbers,” he added.

Mr. Haraszti also added that there were a high number of allegations of election-day fraud, such as undocumented handling of voter lists and ballots, voting on behalf of others, carrousel voting, ballot stuffing, voting without proper documents, and mobile voting abuses.

In 2013, the Special Rapporteur had presented his report to the UN General Assembly on human rights in electoral processes. The report made several recommendations such as creation of independent election commissions with a
pluralistic composition, initiating debates between candidates on national television. Yet, none of these suggestions were implemented.

Mr. Haraszti also called attention to the intimidating environment of the electoral campaign. Calls for boycott of the elections were criminalized since the last elections. Political opponents, including an incarcerated 2010 presidential candidate, were released on the eve of the present presidential elections, but none of them have been reinstated in their political and civil rights.

However, the Special Rapporteur welcomed the fact that the elections took place without violence, unlike the 2010 presidential elections. He also commended the protests carried out in Belarus against the perceived flaws of Sunday’s election.

“I will closely follow what happens to the demonstrators in the aftermath of the elections, given that massive arbitrary short-term detentions and administrative discrimination are the order of day in Belarus,” he added.

Additionally, Mr. Haraszti suggested possible immediate steps including eliminated the oppressive permission based regime of public life, repeal laws that criminalizes public activities without official permission, implementing electoral and media reform, secure judicial independence and introduce a moratorium on death penalty as a transition towards its abolition.

“Modernization processes which are not shouldered by democratisation and the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms are neither sustainable nor meaningful,” the Special Rapporteur stated, reiterating his readiness to cooperate with the Government on the starting steps of a reform.

Mr. Haraszti further commented on the temporary four-month lifting of the European Union (EU) sanctions against Belarus, beginning in January, as signalled by the foreign affairs ministers of the EU yesterday, in response to the release of six political prisoners on the eve of the elections.

The Special Rapporteur described the move as ‘a great opportunity for human rights reforms, in harmony with both the country’s international commitments and the needs of its ordinary citizens.’

Independent experts or 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.

In Iran, UN deputy chief highlights country’s ‘important contributions’ over the decades

13 October - Commemorating in Tehran the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, the UN Deputy Secretary-General has highlighted the contributions Iran has made to the global community over the decades, as well as the significant challenges the country still faces.

“Iran is a founding Member State of the United Nations,” said Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson in remarks to Iranian officials and other diplomats at an event yesterday in the Iranian capital.

“Your country, through the Tehran Declaration of 1943, is closely associated with the birth of the Organization. So, our celebration today has historic roots in your country.”

Mr. Eliasson noted that Iran and the UN have cooperated in many areas, and that one of the country’s most important contributions has been to host one of the largest refugee populations in the world over the past three decades.

“We are grateful to Iran for receiving millions of Afghans, and for its close cooperation with the UN refugee agency,” he stated. “With the current refugee crises in the Middle East and Africa, we see a growing challenge to mobilise greater solidarity and to offer constructive solutions.”
He also highlighted important strides made by the country in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which wrap up at the end of the year.

“Per capita income has doubled since 1980,” Mr. Eliasson pointed out. “Life expectancy has risen considerably. School enrolment is rising. Women now make up more than half of all university students in the country. Iran is one of the few countries to have reached the MDG on maternal mortality and is on track to substantially reduce child mortality.”

Meanwhile, he stressed that Iran, like many nations, still faces significant challenges, in areas related to employment, environmental protection, human rights and ensuring space for civil society and the media to play their vital roles.

“One area of particular importance is the need to create opportunities for young people – especially jobs,” he said. “Iran, like many other countries, must make special efforts to use the demographic opportunity of a large youth population. Youth unemployment is a huge challenge in today’s world – with important social, economic and political ramifications.”

He also warned that the political situation across the region remains deeply troubling, with the crises in Syria, Yemen and Iraq continuing to cause tremendous suffering and instability.

“Regional rivalries are fuelling the crises,” the Deputy Secretary-General cautioned. “Extremist groups continue to attract recruits and control territory, terrorising large parts of the population on ethnic or religious grounds. In Syria and Yemen, it is urgent to move rapidly towards cessation of hostilities and a serious political process and negotiated solutions.”

He added that “tragically, resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict still remains a central task and challenge for all of us as a matter of justice and long term peace and security,” and that Iran has considerable influence in the region.

“We at the United Nations continue the dialogue with Iran on how it can contribute to regional peace and security,” he declared. “My own visit to Tehran is an example of such a dialogue.”

Mr. Eliasson said he is hopeful that new avenues to peaceful conditions will open, now that there has been a “historic” agreement between Iran and the P5+1 countries [China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States], welcomed by a great majority of Member States.

“That agreement showed the immense value of patient and skilful diplomacy. I am confident that the same spirit can be mobilised to address other troubling issues and situations. We all have an interest in peace and security in the region,” he noted.

He also recalled that Iranian President Rouhani was among the many world leaders who came to UN Headquarters in New York last month to show his personal support for the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted universally by Member States.

“We count on the Government of Iran to turn the new Agenda into action at the national level, and to adapt the global goals to national economic planning,” he stated, adding that the UN system in Iran stands ready to assist the country in every way possible in this endeavour.
Burundi: post-election crisis forces UN and partners to seek $32 million in revised relief plan

13 October - The United Nations in Burundi is calling for aid funding for the humanitarian crisis facing the country, which is facing its deepest political crisis since the end of the civil war after President Pierre Nkurunziza’s decision to run for a controversial third term in office.

The plan requires over $32 million to ensure minimum preparedness measures and response. Some 500,000 people could be affected by the crisis, of which up to 400,000 are targeted for humanitarian assistance inside Burundi.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN Resident Coordinator, rather than consolidating “the fragile peace and stability that Burundi enjoyed in recent years, these latest elections seem to have further polarized political stakeholders and plunged the country into a new uncertainty.”

On 1 August 2015, a group of Burundian opposition figures, including former heads of state, met in Addis Ababa and decided to set up a National Council for the Respect of the Arusha Agreement and the Restoration of the Rule of Law (RNAREC). The group have elected Léonard Nyangoma as their leader.

OCHA and the UN Country Team in Burundi have noted that, “given the potential for the crisis to continue or even escalate, humanitarian agencies in Burundi have revised their plan to ensure adequate measures are in place to help save lives and alleviate acute suffering through the provision of necessary coordinated protection and assistance for people in need.”

“When the political and security situation improve, partners are also committed to restore self-reliance through recovery activities targeting the most vulnerable people to build their resilience to shock and lay the foundations for durable solutions.”