Ban condemns ‘despicable’ terrorist attacks in Paris, demands immediate release of reported hostages

13 November - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned the “despicable terrorist attacks” carried out today in various locations in and around Paris and demanded the immediate release of the numerous individuals reportedly being held hostage in the Bataclan theatre.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, the Secretary-General condemned the multiple attacks that took place in the French capital.

Though the situation remains fluid, media reports have suggested that a national state of emergency has been called in the wake of multiple killings throughout Paris, including the Bataclan arts centre in the 11th arrondissement, which appears to be one of four venues attacked and where dozens of people are reportedly being held hostage.

“The Secretary-General trusts that the French authorities will do all in their power to bring the perpetrators to justice quickly,” said the statement.

Extending his deepest condolences to the families of the victims and wishing a speedy recovery to those injured, Mr. Ban said in his statement that he stands with the Government and people of France.
Top UN relief official in Mali condemns ongoing attacks against humanitarian workers

13 November - In the wake of more than two dozen attacks against aid workers and their facilities in the past months, the top United Nations relief official in Mali, Mbaranga Gasarabwe, today condemned the increasing violence against humanitarian organizations in the strife-torn country and warned that such attacks are violations of international law.

“Hindering the work of humanitarian organizations affects first and foremost the most vulnerable people – the men, women and children for whom humanitarian assistance is often a question of survival,” said Ms. Gasarabwe, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Mali.

In a press release issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), she described the most recent incident, saying that just two nights ago, an explosive device was set off at the entrance of a building housing a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Menaka, in the Gao region. Fortunately the explosion caused no injuries and material damage was limited, however the incident is nevertheless part of a recent disturbing trend, said OCHA.

According to the UN relief wing, since the beginning of the year, humanitarian personnel and facilities have been targeted with violence some 30 times.

“Attacks against the personnel and facilities of humanitarian organizations are violations of international humanitarian law,” declared Ms. Gasarabwe.

“The recent signing of the peace agreement by all parties to the conflict represents an opportunity to build a lasting peace in Mali,” she said.

“Humanitarian actors have a key role to play in continuing to respond to urgent needs and strengthen the resilience of people and communities, while longer-term recovery and development actions are being implemented. Areas that were difficult to access during the conflict are now more easily accessible. This will allow for more aid to reach the people in need.”

Some 140 aid organizations work in Mali, about 100 of which are located in the north. They provide essential water, food, health services, education, shelter and livelihood support to hundreds of thousands of people. Their work is guided by the core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality.

Reverse exodus: refugees flee Yemen for strife-riven Horn of Africa, UN reports

13 November - In a reversal of a multi-year boat exodus that has seen hundreds of thousands of Somalis risk death at sea to flee their strife-riven land to seek refuge in Yemen, thousands of Yemenis are now fleeing from their own war-torn country to Djibouti, Somalia’s neighbour, across the Gulf of Aden.

“We have many refugees who recently arrived to the camp, and we can see from their faces and whenever we talk to them that they are traumatized,” says Abdul Rahman Mnarw, community services officer at Markazi camp where the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partners are providing aid in this small desert country in the Horn of Africa.
“They have been through a lot during their flight,” he added, stressing that one of the most urgent issues is providing counselling and emotional support, especially to those who witnessed violence and killings first hand.

As fighting intensifies in Yemen, over 120,000 refugees and migrants have fled since April, with more than 15,000 seeking safety in Djibouti, according to UNHCR.

Though the numbers pale in comparison to the refugees who have fled Africa to Yemen – last month UNHCR reported that there were some 265,000 there, over 250,000 of them Somalis, beyond the countless thousands who fled in previous years and moved on – they are still significant in Djibouti, whose total population is about 820,000.

One of those who fled here is Yemeni fisherman Seif Zeid Abdulah, who was riding home on his motorbike when an airstrike pounded his native Bab El Mandab region. A sudden, concussive blast sent the 27-year-old flying. His left leg shattered by shrapnel, he found he was bleeding heavily from a wound that would require months of rehabilitation and treatment.

“I’d lived in fear that something like this could happen to a close family member, a friend or a neighbour. Then all of a sudden my leg is torn and I am crippled,” he said.

Fearing that medical facilities might become targets – as they already have in the conflict – Zeid Abdullah and other war-wounded civilians are increasingly reluctant to seek public health care within Yemen. Moreover, soaring costs of private clinics are forcing them to seek alternatives.

A slight figure, whose shattered leg is held together by pins, he decided to save his scarce funds and cross to Djibouti in late October, believing he would have a better chance of survival as a refugee.

“In Yemen, I came across many men, women and children whose health is deteriorating due to unhealed wounds,” he said. “I am glad that some have already crossed. I hope the remaining will manage to cross as well,” he added.

Supporting himself on crutches, his wounds exposed to the air, Zeid Abdullah registered as a refugee in the port town of Obock. He is looking forward to safety, protection and medical assistance in Markazi from UNHCR and its partners.

Imad Ali, 28, fled in late October. Crossing the 30-kilometre strait with four other Yemeni men on a seven-metre-long boat, the fisherman left his parents and other siblings back in the port city of Aden, where they first sought refuge.

“I stayed in my native region of Bab El Mandab because someone had to work and provide for the big family despite the high risks,” he said. “But I realised soon after this war is worsening, and I don't have the means to bring everybody to Djibouti.”

He opted to cross to Djibouti to join his fiancée and her family who had settled beforehand as refugees in Markazi camp. “At least, my in-laws can become my second family” said Ali.

Since the end of September, more than 2,000 Yemenis have fled to Djibouti, bringing the number in Markazi camp to around 2,800. As violence at home rages on, seeking safety on the western shores of the Gulf of Aden is increasingly becoming the only resort for thousands of Yemenis.

“We are at about full capacity in Markazi camp,” said Mr. Mnawar. “We already need to plan the extension of the camp to welcome additional refugees.”

Not that the violence in Yemen has stopped Somalis from still seeing it as a refuge from their own violence-torn country. UNHCR reported last month that 70,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants crossed over to the country.

The sea route is extremely dangerous, and 88 deaths have been recorded so far this year. The crews of the people-smuggling boats also frequently brutalize the passengers.
According to UNHCR, the exodus to Yemen has shifted eastwards from the Gulf of Aden to the Arabian Sea coast where people believe the situation is calmer, resulting in over 10,000 new arrivals in September, a 50 per cent increase on August, and over 10,000 in October.

**UN Police play crucial role for success of peacekeeping missions, top officials tell Security Council**

13 November - Though generally far less numerous than the military component in United Nations peacekeeping operations, UN Police play a vital role in protecting civilians and training local forces, facing multiple challenges and dangers in fulfilling their mission, the Security Council heard today.

“UN Police (UNPOL) provide core protection activities and are critical actors in our peacekeeping missions,” Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) Hervé Ladsous told the 15-member body of the component, whose authorized deployment has nearly tripled to over 13,000 in the last decade and now participates in 10 of the 17 current missions.

“Enhancing the capabilities of UN Police will further improve their ability to protect…This includes rapid deployment of police units in situations with urgent protection needs,” he said.

He noted the role undertaken in the Central African Republic (CAR) with round-the-clock monitoring of internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, where UNPOL last month prevented an attack in Bangui, the capital, by nearly 200 armed ex-Séléka members, coming under fire themselves.

Mr. Ladsous highlighted the critical role UNPOL played in Haiti where joint operations with the Haitian National Police allowed the Government to re-establish order in notoriously unstable areas over the last year.

In the Grand Ravine slums of Port-au-Prince, the capital, joint operations allowed the first humanitarian and development activities to be conducted, including water distribution and medical care.

UNPOL also provides critical capacity-building to host States to protect civilians by training and rebuilding national police as in Mali, where UN mobile training units have delivered technical assistance and specialized training to over 8,800 Malian security forces.

“UN Police are essential actors in ensuring that their national counterparts carry out the training and institutional reforms to make them effective and accountable protectors of the populace and in helping their colleagues build a trusting relationship with the communities that they are intended to protect,” Mr. Ladsous said.

He also called for more UN women police officers. “Despite an increase in female police officers in missions, the number still falls short of UN targets,” he said. “DPKO understands our missions' limitations, and is working hard to implement our Protection of Civilians (POC) Action Plan to strengthen our police as well as our military and civilian components.”

Detailing the challenges confronting UNPOL operations on the ground in some of the world’s worst trouble spots, the Deputy Police Commissioner of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), Charles Bent, underscored the “constant, daily threats” in trying to maintain order in POC sites where populations have ballooned to 180,000 over the past two years.

“The UNMISS POC mission suffers many challenges and dangers,” he said “Situations can quickly escalate to where staff members are surrounded by tens and even hundreds of aggressive and threatening IDPs. Serious physical injury to UN personnel has happened on several occasions…”

“The scope of this tasking is vast and includes civilians sheltering for safety in various venues, including those which are within UN compounds,” he added. “Against these challenges, UNMISS continues to look for innovative ways, ‘a better way’ of doing things.”
These include the Pilot Project for Safe Return based on training South Sudan police to protect human rights, especially those of women and children, and to tackle gender violence. The newly proposed Joint Integrated Police has “great potential here to positively influence and build the future national police service of South Sudan,” he stressed.

Police Commissioner Pascal Champion of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) devoted his presentation to the Beni region, in the east of the vast country, where UNPOL and the national police force (PNC) have been waging a joint struggle against “grave threats and multiple killings” for the past 18 months.

He noted that the PNC “suffers from very numerous deficiencies,” including poor training, antiquated infrastructure and a lack of funding from both the Government and the UN.

“This joint UNPOL-PNC goes beyond the mere policing dimension to target a more global approach,” he said. “The strategy combines the protection of civilians and the restoration of State authority.”

In Liberia, where the UN peacekeeping mission (UNMIL) played a key role in restoring peace and stability after years of civil war, the Ebola epidemic that began in 2014 and infected nearly 11,000 people, killing over 4,800, presented UNPOL with “unprecedented challenges,” UN Police Commissioner Greg Hinds said.

“It tested the Mission's ability to re-think and adapt the execution of its protection of civilians’ mandate, and explored new areas of cooperation and support with the national police and other actors in providing a security envelope to allow the necessary health and humanitarian efforts to occur.

“This highlights the critical role police play, in often unpredictable operational contexts, in protecting civilians,” he added, stressing that that policing “remains an integral part of UN peace operations, and we must have clear, credible and achievable mandates, matched by appropriate resources.”

**Ahead of World Diabetes Day, UN calls for greater action to turn tide of growing global epidemic**

13 November - With the World Health Organization (WHO) warning that diabetes will be the 7th leading cause of death by 2030, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is emphasizing that people must take steps towards leading healthy lives while governments create conditions to stem the global epidemic.

“Let us all step up to limit the impact of diabetes,” Mr. Ban said in his message for World Diabetes Day, which is marked annually on 14 November.

Close to 350 million people in the world have diabetes, a chronic disease that occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin or when it cannot effectively use the insulin it does produce to help the body metabolize the sugar that is formed from the food we eat.

“There is much all of us can do to minimize our risk of getting the disease and, even if we do get it, to live long and healthy lives with it,” the UN chief said, suggesting, for example, that “anyone who can stand instead of sit, walks a little bit more each day and is generally more active should do so.”

WHO is also marking World Diabetes Day 2015 by announcing that the Organization’s annual World Health Day, which recognizes its birthday on 7 April, will focus on the issue of diabetes.

“World Health Day will provide an important platform for promoting efforts to prevent diabetes and ensure optimal management of the condition for people living with one of the various forms of disease,” the health agency said.

Multiple actions can be taken to reduce the impact of diabetes, through adopting healthy lifestyles, such as partaking in physical activity and healthy diets, to government action on curbing the marketing of unhealthy foods and ensuring health.
systems provide the required services and care for people living with the disease.

In his message, Mr. Ban said the world recently took a major step in adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and incorporating a target to reduce by one third the deaths attributed to non-communicable diseases, including diabetes, by 2030.

“On World Diabetes Day, let us recognize the progress we have made, but let us also acknowledge that it is not yet enough,” he said. “Let us all step up to limit the impact of diabetes.”

In 2012, diabetes was the direct cause of some 1.5 million deaths, with more than 80% of them occurring in low- and middle-income countries. WHO projects that diabetes will be the 7th leading cause of death by 2030.

There are two main forms of the disease. People with type 1 diabetes typically make none of their own insulin and therefore require insulin injections for survival. People with type 2 diabetes, the form that comprises some 90 per cent of all cases, usually produce their own insulin, but not enough or they are unable to use it properly. People with type 2 diabetes are typically overweight and sedentary.

“But, properly treated, the impact of diabetes can be minimised,” according to WHO.

On 20 December 2006, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution recognizes diabetes as a chronic, debilitating and costly disease associated with major complications that pose severe risks for families, countries and the entire world, and designated 14 November as a UN day to be observed every year beginning in 2007.

Started by WHO and the International Diabetes Federation, the Day is celebrated on 14 November to mark the birthday of Frederick Banting who, along with Charles Best, was instrumental in the discovery of insulin in 1922, a life-saving treatment for diabetes patients.

**UN at 70: former envoy and Nobel laureate says Security Council reform vital for more effective Organization**

13 November - “Old tools and approaches are not always enough to solve current complex crises.” This is according to former Finnish President and United Nations envoy Martti Ahtisaari, who highlights the importance of reforming the Security Council, as he reflects on the UN’s 70th anniversary in a new book published for the occasion.

To coincide with the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UN, Rizzoli publishers have released *The United Nations at 70: Restoration and Renewal*, a book that celebrates in words and photographs both the Organization itself and its landmark headquarters on the eastern edge of midtown Manhattan.

The book opens with a foreword by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who looks back on the accomplishments of the UN, and an introductory essay, ‘Personal Reflections on the United Nations at Seventy,’ by Mr. Ahtisaari, who has served the world body in many roles.

In 1989, Mr. Ahtisaari went to Namibia as the Secretary-General’s Special Representative to lead the UN Transition Assistance Group, and helped pave the way for the country to achieve independence from South Africa. In 2005, he was appointed as the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo.

After his tenure as Finland’s President from 1994-2000, he founded the Crisis Management Initiative, which, among other projects, helped Aceh achieve special autonomy from Indonesia. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008 for his work in Namibia, Kosovo and Indonesia.

In his essay, Mr. Ahtisaari reflects on his work with the UN, outlining his involvement in both Namibia and Kosovo, and also pondering larger concerns affecting the Organization today. Among them is a subject that Member States have been
grappling with for some two decades – Security Council reform.

“I have learned from my tasks that cooperation with the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council is crucial,” the former envoy writes, noting “There are instances when the permanent members of the Security Council abstain from obstructing the process. Benign abstention can also be a silent contribution to the settlement of a difficult issue.”

Speaking to the UN News Centre following the book’s launch at UN Headquarters last month, Mr. Ahtisaari reiterated his belief that the support of the Council’s permanent members is essential to solving crises such as the ongoing tragedy in Syria.

“We have looked now at UN reforms and also looked at the Security Council reform,” he said, “and I think it is important that we get new Member States. And our proposal is that we can’t have new permanent members who have a veto right – that will never be accepted by existing ones.” But, he said, the term lengths of temporary members might be continued so that, in effect, they become permanent seats, “as long as the Member States are supporting that particular country there.”

He also said that “we could also look for voluntary promises from permanent members that they don’t use their veto in cases where there is a national disaster that needs to be addressed.”

In the book, he notes that “crises take many shapes and no two crises are likely to be identical, or even related or comparable,” adding that “what is crucial is establishing a human relationship with the parties and acting in a manner that convinces them of the sincerity of the mediator.”

His experience in Namibia “was pivotal in reaching an understanding of the kinds of issues I would come to deal with later on,” and that he realized that “idealism and realism are not mutually exclusive.”

“I think idealism means that – I said it in my speech in Oslo when I got the Nobel Peace Prize – that all conflicts can be solved. You have to believe in that,” he said during the interview.

He also singles out the problem of growing inequality in his essay, calling it “the most serious challenge of our time,” and noting his happiness that it has been included as a goal in the new 2030 Agenda, which Member States adopted in September to guide their efforts over the next 15 years as they seek to end poverty, promote prosperity and well-being for all, protect the environment and address climate change.

Asked about his hopes for the UN for the next 70 years, Mr. Ahtisaari said that, having worked with five Secretaries-General and approaching his 80th birthday, he was not too keen to play an active role himself. He reiterated his belief though that the UN was “badly needed in the world,” and that the international community should ensure that the Organization becomes even more effective in order to manage the multiple challenges it faces.

**Regional religious leaders meet in Jordan in UN-backed bid to counter hate speech, incitement**

**13 November** - Some 30 religious leaders from the Middle East and North Africa are developing a regional strategy to counter hate speech as part of an international effort co-sponsored by the United Nations to intervene when incitement is widespread and the risk of violence imminent.

The leaders met in Amman, Jordan, this week under the co-sponsorship of the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, Columbia Global Centers Middle East (Amman) and Columbia Global Freedom of Expression, building on strategies religious leaders from around the world adopted in Fez, Morocco, in April.

The gathering was the second of five regional meetings of religious leaders to develop regional strategies to prevent incitement to violence. The first brought together religious leaders from Europe in Treviso, Italy, in September.
“The readiness of all religious leaders gathered here in Amman – who come from different countries and have different faiths and beliefs – to work together to deal with this challenge is truly impressive,” UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng told the meeting, which ended yesterday.

“I commend their commitment and their willingness to act, and look forward to seeing the results of this meeting. States are responsible for the protection of their populations, but everyone has a role to play. Given their spiritual leadership and influence, religious leaders have a special responsibility and their engagement is essential to prevent and counter incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.”

The leaders proposed setting up a network of leaders from different religions to prevent incitement in the region, increase the awareness of State authorities of the challenges and the measures that could be taken, train religious leaders on the use of social media to reach wider audiences, and express solidarity with the victims of incitement to violence.

The Fez meeting called for monitoring incitement, developing alternative messages, engaging in dialogue, revising education to appreciate all cultures, strengthening inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue and activities to ensure understanding, respect and communication, and engaging with political leaders.

The draft Plan of Action agreed on there is being further developed at the five regional meetings over the next year, and will be adopted at a plenary meeting of religious leaders planned for next year.

The draft recommends several other actions including dialogue training, mapping and networking of religious leaders who actively work to prevent incitement that can lead to atrocity crimes around the world, engaging with youth and ensuring a gender perspective in all actions proposed and undertaken.

**Measles vaccination saved 17 million lives since 2000, but elimination goals ‘off track’ – UN**

13 November - The number of measles-related deaths has decreased by 79 per cent since the beginning of the century, but the United Nations health agency is warning that 2015 global milestones and measles elimination goals are off track.

New data released by the World Health Organization (WHO) for the Measles & Rubella Initiative, estimates that 17.1 million lives have been saved since 2000, largely due to increased vaccination coverage against this highly contagious viral disease. Measles vaccination has also reportedly played a key role in reducing child mortality and in progress towards Millennium Development Goal 4.

However, the new data published in this week’s edition of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC), “Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report” and WHO’s Weekly Epidemiological Record, shows that overall progress towards increasing global immunization coverage has recently stagnated.

While coverage with the first dose of the measles vaccine increased globally from 72 per cent to 85 per cent between 2000 and 2010, it has remained unchanged over the past 4 years.

“We cannot afford to drop our guard,” said Dr. Jean-Marie Okwo-Bele, Director of WHO’s Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals, in a news release. “If children miss routine vaccination and are not reached by national immunization campaigns, we will not close the immunization gap.”

The health agency is warning that based on current trends of measles vaccination coverage and incidence, the 2015 global milestones and measles elimination goals set by its Member States will not be achieved on time.

WHO also stressed that although all countries include at least one dose of measles-containing vaccine in their routine vaccination schedule, only 122 – or 63 per cent – have met the target of at least 90 per cent of children vaccinated with a first dose. Additionally, only half of the world’s children are receiving the recommended second dose of the vaccine.
Meanwhile, WHO and its partners, such as the public-private partnership known as the GAVI Alliance, underlined that sustained efforts are needed to maintain the current level of control.

“Despite the welcome reduction in measles deaths, this highly-infectious disease continues to take a terrible toll on the lives of children around the world,” said Dr. Seth Berkley, CEO of GAVI. “A coordinated approach that puts stronger routine immunization at its core will be central to getting measles under control and securing further reductions in mortality from this vaccine-preventable disease.”

**Burundi: UN experts urge Security Council to follow resolution with 'concrete' steps to stop rights abuses**

13 November - Welcoming the adoption by the Security Council of a new resolution yesterday strongly condemning the ongoing killings and human rights violations in Burundi, a group of UN independent experts has expressed outrage at the situation and warned that the central African “is going towards an unacceptable path of atrocities.”

The experts welcomed the “clear message and alert” sent by the Council’s unanimously adopted resolution, which condemned the increased cases of human rights violations and abuses in Burundi, the seven UN Special Rapporteurs emphasized that actions must now be undertaken to follow up the text and provide “concrete responses fitting the magnitude of the risks at stake, for Burundi and the region.”

The experts went on to recount a raft of ills, saying the situation in Burundi continues to deteriorate with daily reports of serious human rights violations, including extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, attacks on independent media and harassment and killing of human rights defenders, unjustified limitations on freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression, adding to more than 200,000 persons displaced by violence.

“This is a crisis that is eminently political in nature and entails an increased risk of escalation of violence and further fracturing of the Burundian society,” the experts warned and urged the Security Council to adopt immediate measures if the security situation deteriorates further, and prevent additional loss of life.

They also urged the Burundian authorities to take immediate steps “to put an end to the rampant human rights violations and ensure there is no impunity for the perpetrators.”

The experts recalled that in the last two months, reports received suggested that people arrested by the security forces have been found dead, many with signs of torture, in several locations of the capital, Bujumbura, stressing that nothing under international law can justify these “unacceptable” violations.

Last week, Welli Nzitonda, the son of a prominent human rights defender was found dead after being arrested by the police earlier in the day.

“The brutal killing of Mr. Nzitonda shows that, in spite of constant demands, nothing has been done to protect human rights defenders in Burundi,” said the Special Rapporteurs. “If a well-known and reputed [rights] defender is attacked in such a way, we fear the worst for those defenders who are more isolated and less visible,” they stressed.

The Special Rapporteurs warned that the situation in Burundi dangerously worsened in the recent weeks and observed that security forces continue to disrespect the human rights of Burundians, amid a general climate of impunity.

“Horrendous manoeuvres or strategies that seek stifle a plurality of views in civil society, send a chilling message to those trying to assemble peacefully and associate freely and only add to the insecurity in the country,” the independent experts said adding that the members of the security forces and supporters of the ruling party have also been attacked and killed by unidentified armed men.

“We call for political solutions and mobilize all means and instruments available to prevent a further deterioration of the
situation, including through political dialogue and ensuring accountability for the violations committed,” the experts said urging the authorities to dissociate themselves from divisive and inflammatory speeches.

Further, the independent experts called on the UN to provide all the resources necessary for the High Commission for Human Rights, the African Union and the African Commission of Human Rights to effectively operate in the country, in particular monitoring and report on the human rights situation, and supporting prevention efforts as a matter of priority.

“In this context, we take note of the commitment of the Burundi Government to fully cooperate with the UN Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, and call, in particular, for a visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on summary executions to the country – whose request has been left without answer by the Government,” they concluded.

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.

The experts participating in this call are: the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Michel Forst; the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Juan E. Méndez; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Chaloka Beyani; and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Pablo de Greiff.

Some 3,300 people a day still arriving on Lesvos – UN refugee agency

13 November - Despite dangerous sea conditions, the United Nations refugee agency today reported that the number of refugees and migrants arriving on Lesvos continues to be high, at an average of 3,300 people per day so far in November.

“Of the 660,000 refugees and migrants who have reached Greece this year more than half have landed at Lesvos,” Adrian Edwards, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters at a press briefing in Geneva.

“With winter now approaching, the reception conditions and capacity there remain a problem and a number of actions are being taken to address that,” he continued.

So far in 2015, UNHCR estimates that some 3,460 lives have been lost on the Mediterranean, 360 in the last four weeks. Some 250 of these were in the Aegean Greek territorial waters.

The agency says it is working with the Hellenic Coast Guard to facilitate the deployment of additional experienced life guards and has provided equipment to support the on-going rescue efforts on Lesvos.

In light of the continuing strains on Lesvos, UNHCR is also establishing presences at six strategic locations along the island’s north shore to provide newly-arriving refugees with immediate life-saving help, working with volunteers and a new medical NGO partner – Women and Health Alliance International (WAHA) – whose capacity is also being enhanced.

This will be in addition to the existing assembly points where UNHCR and partners already provide places to rest, clothes, food, clean water and medical support. Eight buses and three mini vans are being used to transport new arrivals from the beaches to the reception sites, and this will be expanded as required.

“We are also appealing to the authorities to create additional accommodation and reception capacity as a matter of urgency,” Mr. Edwards said. “There are only 2,800 reception places for the 12,000 refugees and migrants currently on the island. As a result, many people, including women, children and new-born babies have no choice but to sleep outside, lighting fires to
UNHCR is also underlining that urgent improvements to facilities for refugees in the island’s east at Moria and Kara Tape, under the respective responsibility of the police and the municipality, are also needed, including lighting, latrines and heating as well as site management.

For the time being, refugees reportedly have to find themselves a place where to sleep in the few shelters available creating conditions for the “strongest” to find a shelter to the detriment of persons with specific needs. UNHCR, its partners and volunteers have to constantly intervene to prevent these situations from happening, and are noting it is critical to designate a site manager with the appropriate authority and resources.

In addition to these actions, UNHCR announced its staffing on Lesvos is being increased. Thirteen additional staff members have been deployed, many speaking the language of the refugees, and bringing the total staff on Lesvos to 30.

“We have brought in more humanitarian aid with 295,000 relief items, including 37,000 blankets to keep people warm, over 45,000 coats to protect people from rain, as well as hygiene and baby care kits, sleeping mats and plastic sheeting,” the spokesperson highlighted.

Meanwhile, the agency stressed that the recent agreement reached by leaders in October on the Western Balkans migration route for people fleeing Syria and other strife-torn regions, which calls to establish more reception places in Greece, will be a key factor in stabilizing the situation, but fast implementation is needed.

**UN says 13 million affected by disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean region in 2015**

13 November - A staggering 13.2 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean were affected by disasters between January and October 2015, a report from the United Nations relief wing revealed, warning the situation could be further exacerbated by the current powerful El Niño.

According to a bulletin published by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the figure exceeds the number of people affected in 2014 (11.4 million), serving as a reminder that “preparedness efforts must remain a priority to reduce impacts and humanitarian needs.”

The report also found that drought affected most people (7 million), followed by excessive rains, floods and epidemics like dengue, chikungunya and cholera.

Some of the other disasters that affected the region in 2015 are hurricanes, violence, environmental emergencies and cold waves, the report said.

Additionally, the report warns that El Niño will worsen drought in Central America and will bring above average rainfall in South America, where it is expected to peak in November-December.

Further, the study Hunger without Borders, conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP) revealed that there is a correlation between food insecurity, violence and migration in countries of the Northern Triangle in Central America.

The report recommended a more profound analysis of the situation in order to have a deeper understanding of the effects of violence, food insecurity and their impact on migratory patterns.

Further recommendations included reinsertion of deportees and returnees, strengthening the resilience of children and youth whose parents have emigrated against crime and violence, promoting livelihoods, and developing advocacy strategies where
local governments play a leading role, along with UN agencies and other international organizations.

Lastly, the report underscored the need to initiate concrete actions at the first World Humanitarian Summit, slated to take place in Istanbul, Turkey in 2016, and to find new ways to address the humanitarian needs in a changing world.

“The World Humanitarian Summit is our generation’s opportunity to re-inspire the world with our humanitarian ambition,” said Under-Secretary-General for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien.

**Security Council strongly condemns terrorist attacks in Beirut suburb**

13 November - The United Nations Security Council has strongly condemned the terrorist attack on 12 November in the Beirut suburb of Burj al-Barajneh that killed at least 43 and injured more than 200 people.

In a press statement, the Council’s 15 members expressed their deep sympathy and 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.

Underlining the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice, the Council 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 members of the Council reaffirmed that terrorism in all 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, whenever and by whomsoever committed.

The members of the Security Council reaffirmed their strong support for the stability, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and political independence of Lebanon.

**Ukraine: as winter closes in, UN warns 700,000 children at risk due to severely damaged heating systems**

13 November - About 700,000 children in Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine are in danger of the potential failure of the heating systems during the winter months, said United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today adding that conflict in the region has heavily damaged the interlinked water, heating and electricity service.

In Eastern Ukraine, where temperatures in the winter drops to -20°C to -30°C, five million people are completely dependent on two severely damaged centralized water systems, said William Fellows, Head of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Section, UNICEF Office in Ukraine, at the regular bi-weekly press briefing in Geneva.

He stressed the urgency of the repairs to be completed before winter sets in as there is a real concern that water in the system would freeze and burst the pipes, causing further damage and the failure of the interlinked heating, water and electricity systems.

Mr. Fellows said that although some of the damage was repaired by UNICEF and its partners after managing to get access to certain areas, the repair of remaining parts was hampered by lack of access and the existence of minefields.

UNICEF called for humanitarian access, the removal of mines, and the urgent repair of the infrastructure in order to
minimize the risks to lives, especially of children.

Responding to a question, Mr. Fellows said that “since the mines were placed by both parties of the conflict; the de-facto authorities and the Government, both have the capacities to determine the areas fairly quickly.

Although UNICEF does not have the maps of the minefield, it does have detailed maps of where the repairs were needed in the supply system, which were shared with the parties to the conflict and with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Mr. Fellows concluded.

**Joint UN body to probe chemical weapons in Syria is now ‘fully operational’**

13 November - A joint body between the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to investigate the use of chemical weapons in Syria is fully operational as of today, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has informed the Security Council.

In a letter to the 15-member body dated 10 November, Mr. Ban said of the so-called UN Joint Investigation Mechanism (JIM) has proceeded with the recruitment of its core and administrative staff, Deputy UN Spokesperson Farhan Haq told the daily news briefing at UN Headquarters.

“And during the last month, it has also moved to set up its offices in both New York and The Hague, [Netherlands] as well as a light presence in Damascus,” Syria, the Spokesperson said.

“The Joint Investigation Mechanism is now sufficiently staffed to declare itself fully operational as of today,” he said.

The mechanism was established this past August after the passage of a resolution by the UN Security Council and is located in The Hague.

The joint body, established for a period of one year with a possibility of future extension, will be tasked with identifying “individuals, entities, groups, or governments involved in the use of chemicals as weapons, including chlorine or any other toxic chemical,” in Syria, according to the Council, which reiterated that those responsible must be held accountable.