In the headlines:

- Burundi: UN chief urges restraint, condemns all attempts to oust elected governments by military force
- UN ‘Free & Equal’ campaign launches video spotlighting LGBT diversity, fight against homophobia
- ‘Untold suffering’ of South Sudanese people must end, UN envoy tells Security Council
- UNESCO chief urges international action as fighting threatens Syria’s iconic Palmyra archaeological site
- Ban urges borders and ports be kept open to thousands stranded at sea in Southeast Asia
- At Security Council, UN officials warn against ‘waning’ global attention to plight of civilians in Iraq
- Haiti: senior UN official says cholera outbreak needs ‘urgent attention’
- In Geneva, UN envoy on Syria meets with officials from the Russian Federation and United Kingdom
- UN-facilitated accord leads to release of some 350 children in Central African Republic
- Ban kicks off meeting to boost commitment to ‘Every Woman, Every Child’ initiative
- UN refugee chief visits Kenya and Somalia to discuss future of Dadaab camp
- Yemen: UN chief hails important humanitarian pause as critical aid reaches civilians

Burundi: UN chief urges restraint, condemns all attempts to oust elected governments by military force

14 May - Calling urgently for calm and restraint, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned all attempts to oust elected governments by military force and appealed to the country’s political and security leaders to “clearly and openly reject the use of violence, refrain from acts of revenge, and rein in their militants.”

“The Secretary-General is gravely concerned by developments in Burundi since the announcement of the electoral candidacy of President [Pierre] Nkurunziza, and especially in the aftermath of the 13 May declaration of a coup d'état,” according to a statement issued today by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.

A Flash Update issued yesterday by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that a coup d'état had reportedly taken place in the Burundian capital, Bujumbura, after President Nkurunziza left for the Summit of the East African Community, which was intended to try to resolve the crisis.

Popular protests erupted after the country’s ruling National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party nominated on 26 April Mr. Nkurunziza as its presidential candidate for a third term. The ensuing violence has sent thousands of people fleeing to neighbouring countries, according to the UN.
In his statement today, the Secretary-General condemned “attempts to oust elected governments by military force,” and he appealed for strict respect of Burundi’s Constitution as well as the UN-backed Arusha Agreement.

“The Secretary-General now urgently calls for calm and restraint,” the statement continued, underscoring Mr. Ban’s urgent call on all political and security leaders to clearly and openly reject the use of violence, refrain from acts of revenge, and rein in their militants.

He also stressed that anyone responsible for ordering or committing human rights violations will be held accountable. “In this regard, he has full confidence that the Security Council will consider the various tools at its disposal in examining the situation in Burundi, including regarding accountability,” the statement added.

“The United Nations reminds the Burundian authorities of their obligation to ensure the protection of all Burundian citizens, as well as United Nations personnel and premises,” it said, noting that the Secretary-General commends the East African Community (EAC) for its leadership.

According to the statement, Mr. Ban is in close contact with leaders in the region, and through his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, Said Djinnit, the UN will continue to work closely with the EAC, the African Union and other partners in joint efforts to help resolve the crisis in Burundi.

“He also urges Burundians to create the conditions for the holding of inclusive, violence free and credible elections, as soon as possible,” the statement concludes.

Meanwhile, UN relief agencies today agreed to develop a regional response plan to deal with the exodus of refugees fleeing Burundi to neighbouring countries, as the situation in the crisis-gripped east African nation continues to deteriorate weeks after election-related political tensions and violence erupted.

Regional Representatives from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) reached the agreement during a two-day inter-agency consultation in Nairobi, Kenya that concluded today.

The plan will be finalized before the end of May and cover an initial period of six months starting 1 April 2015, the date when refugee flows started. Some 55,000 asylum seekers from Burundi have sought refuge in neighbouring Rwanda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) countries over the past six weeks and those numbers are expected to rapidly rise.

Explaining the consultative process to donors Stefano Severe, Regional Refugee Coordinator for the Great Lakes Refugee Situation and UNHCR’s Regional Representative in the DRC said that UNHCR has been monitoring developments in the Great Lakes Region, particularly population movements and forced displacement linked to scenarios in eastern DRC and Burundi.

He added that he had met with Special Envoy Djinnit to explore synergies between the political and peacebuilding initiatives carried out by and on behalf of the Secretary-General. The Regional Refugee Coordinator commended UN and non-governmental organization partners’ ongoing efforts to protect and assist persons affected by the Burundi crisis.

"While focusing on emergency response, I would like to reiterate the primacy of protection, the importance of placing ‘Human Rights Up Front’ and of including durable solutions in our responses," Mr. Severe said, adding that the emergency response an include support to early recovery as a lifesaving measure as emphasized by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the World Bank and the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

Regional partners will be looking to harmonize approaches, planning scenarios and projections of refugee numbers as well as priority actions and minimum standards of response across the affected countries. The Burundi population is highly vulnerable, and with escalating prices of basic commodities in the country, the imperative of quick effective responses to their needs cannot be overstated.
According to UNHCR figures, 25,455 people had crossed into Rwanda as of 11 May, with 8,750 in Democratic Republic of the Congo as of 12 May, and 37,474 as of 13 May in Tanzania, comprising 15,452 new arrivals in Nyarangusu Camp. A further 20,000 were reported to be waiting in Kagunga village, and 2,022 on the way to Nyarangusu Camp.

**UN ‘Free & Equal’ campaign launches video spotlighting LGBT diversity, fight against homophobia**

14 May - A new United Nations ‘Free & Equal’ campaign video highlighting the diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community is being shown today on the massive screens in New York’s Times Square ahead of International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia.

The Day, marked Sunday, 17 May in countries around the world, this year focuses on the plight faced by young people in the LGBTI community. The two-and-a-half-minute video played on the giant Reuters and NASDAQ screens in Times Square focuses on the contributions this community makes to families and local communities around the world.

The cast features real people filmed in their workplaces and homes – among them, a firefighter, a police officer, a teacher, an electrician, a doctor, a volunteer and two same sex parents. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also makes an appearance in the video’s final scene, helping to underscore the UN’s appeal for allies to join the push for greater acceptance and equality for LGBT people everywhere. The singer Sara Bareilles lent her support to the project by granting permission for her iconic song *Brave* to be used for the video’s soundtrack.

“Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people are now reaching new frontiers and celebrating remarkable achievements. Despite this transformation, acts of discrimination and violence continue against the LGBTI community,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in a video message to mark the International Day.

“We cannot tolerate picking and choosing rights in a modern society – a society where diversity is celebrated; a society where everyone, no matter where they live or whom they love, is able to live in peace and security; a society where everyone can contribute to the health and well-being of their community,” he added, calling on everyone to join the movement for social justice, equality and equity, so that all people can live with respect and dignity.

Adding her voice to this call for justice and equality, Irina Bokova, Director-General of UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), pointed to evidence that shows that LGBTI young people are overwhelmingly exposed to stigma, discrimination and violence, with tragic consequences, including lifelong trauma and self-harm.

“For instance, a 2014 study, conducted in Thailand with support from UNESCO, revealed that 56 per cent of LGBT students had reported bullying in the last month. A significant proportion of [them] reported missing classes, feeling depressed, having unprotected sex, or had attempted suicide,” Ms. Bokova said.

She highlighted the 2016 meeting of Ministers of Education at UNESCO in Paris, set to be held on the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia next year, to launch the first global report on the status of education sector responses to homophobic and transphobic violence, including bullying. She said this will provide a review of the scope and consequences of the phenomenon across regions, with examples from across the world that illustrate a holistic education sector responses, and recommendations for improvements in existing policies.

Also ahead of the International Day, which this year falls on Sunday, a group of UN and international human rights experts also called on States to act to overcome prejudice and stereotypes through anti-discrimination initiatives in schools and public education campaigns. States must address intersectional discrimination and violence against LGBT and intersex youth on the basis of race and ethnicity.

“LGBT young people too often face rejection by their families and communities who disapprove of their sexual orientation...
or gender identity. This can result in high rates of homelessness, social exclusion, and poverty,” the experts said.

What’s more, LGBT children are often bullied by classmates and teachers, resulting in some students dropping out. They may even be refused school admission or expelled on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

“The stigma and discrimination LGBT children and young adults face have a detrimental impact on their self-esteem, and are associated with higher rates of depression and suicide than their peers,” the experts emphasized.

In some countries, young LGBT persons are subjected to harmful so-called ‘therapies’ intended to ‘modify’ their orientation or identity. Such therapies are unethical, unscientific and ineffective and may be tantamount to torture, the experts explained.

Intersex children and young people may be subjected to medically unnecessary, irreversible surgery and treatment without their free and informed consent. These interventions can result in severe, long-term physical and psychological suffering, affecting children’s rights to health and privacy and may constitute torture or ill-treatment. States should prohibit such interventions.

“Societal attitudes against LGBT and intersex persons should not be used as justification to promote discriminatory laws and policies, to perpetuate discriminatory treatment, or to fail to investigate and prosecute those responsible for violence against LGBT and intersex children and young people,” they added.

The health and well-being of all children and young adults must be protected, including through ensuring access to non-discriminatory health services and comprehensive sexuality education, and by protecting the rights of all children and young adults to their identity, autonomy, and physical and psychological integrity.

They called on States to comply with their obligation to protect and fulfil the rights of all children and young adults without discrimination, to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children and young people are consulted and participate in discussions on policies and laws that impact on their rights.

‘Untold suffering’ of South Sudanese people must end, UN envoy tells Security Council

14 May - The security situation in South Sudan deteriorated further during late April and early May, the head of the United Nations mission in the country warned today as she briefed the Security Council on the “very worrying” developments that have had a devastating effect on civilians.

“The untold suffering of the people of South Sudan must stop,” Ellen Margrethe Løj, head of the UN Mission (UNMISS) declared today, as she presented to the Council the latest report of the Secretary-General.

“Every day without a political agreement contributes to a further deterioration of the situation on the ground, leading to greater displacement and human misery, and risks regional peace and security,” she added.

Ms. Løj, who also serves as the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for South Sudan, said that the most serious situation is currently in Unity state, where there are reports of Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) advances and fighting as they push into southern areas of the oil-rich region towards Koch, Leer and Adok.

In all, over 2 million people remain displaced, with more than 1.5 million internally, and some 500,000 in neighbouring countries. More than 2.5 million people face severe food insecurity, especially in the greater Upper Nile region, and this figure will most likely increase significantly.
What’s more, the economic situation continues to deteriorate, particularly with a drop in oil revenues, heavy expenditure on defence and the inability of the Government to secure external financial support. The situation will continue to decline if conflict continues and external aid is not forthcoming, she warned.

The flow of internally displaced persons (IDPs) into the UNMISS camp in Bentiu, capital of Unite state, some 2,400 so far in May, and the general displacement of innocent civilians has continued. Serious human rights violations persist as well, she said, reiterating to all their responsibility to abide by international law, and take all measures to ensure the safety of civilians and aid organizations.

“Not only are more IDPs arriving but incidents of ethnic, political and tribal clashes have grown during the last two months,” she said.

Fighting between Dinka and Shilluk militias, both affiliated with the SPLA, has occurred in Malakal, Fashoda and Akoka, Upper Nile state. The origins of the tension lie in an historic land dispute, but this has developed into a situation which has gone out of hand, said Ms. Løj.

Outside of the traditional conflict zone of the greater Upper Nile region, UNMISS is also paying close attention to repeated inter-communal violence in other states involving cattle-raiding incidents and revenge attacks in which women and children are often targeted.

Ms. Løj highlighted the multitude of challenges in UNMISS civilian protection sites, including crime, gang-related violence, and ethnically based disturbances. As of 6 May, UNMISS provided protection to nearly 120,000 displaced persons in seven sites, including about 53,000 in Bentiu, 34,000 in Juba, and now nearly 29,000 in Malakal following the latest fighting in the area.

While the arrival of additional troops has permitted the Mission to expand its reach, capacity and resource constraints limit protection activities by its military personnel.

UNMISS continues to receive reports of gross violations of human rights, indicating the unsafe conditions faced by civilians in many parts of the country. In the greater Upper Nile area, the mission investigated allegations of civilians killed in hostilities in Malakal, Akoka and Fashoda during April. It is also monitoring closely the aggressive posture of the SPLA towards IDPs sheltering in the UNMISS site in Bentiu, where several people have been killed and injured.

On a more positive note, some 1,757 children linked to the Cobra Faction have been demobilized, she said.

“As important as the release of child soldiers is, it is equally important to support vocational training and livelihood related efforts to ensure that they don’t relapse into joining another armed group,” Ms. Løj added.

She urged the Government and the opposition to renew their commitment to facilitate the work of the UN in South Sudan, and expressed concern of the continued incidence of unlawful arrests, detentions and abductions, including targeting of UN and humanitarian personnel. Three World Food Programme (WFP) national staff went missing on 1 April and have still not been found.

“There is no alternative to silencing the guns and concluding a comprehensive peace agreement in order to turn South Sudan towards the path of peace and stability,” she said.
UNESCO chief urges international action as fighting threatens Syria’s iconic Palmyra archaeological site

14 May - The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) today expressed deep concern over fighting near the Syrian archaeological site of Palmyra that is endangering the nearby population and posing an imminent threat to the iconic ruins, calling out to all parties “to make every effort to prevent its destruction.”

“The site has already suffered four years of conflict, it suffered from looting and represents an irreplaceable treasure for the Syrian people and for the world,” UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova said.

“I appeal to all parties to protect Palmyra and make every effort to prevent its destruction.”

According to several sources, armed extremist groups raided the city of Tadmur, home to the archaeological site of Palmyra. Inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, it is considered one of the most important cultural sites in the Middle East.

An oasis in the Syrian desert, northeast of Damascus, Palmyra contains the monumental ruins of a great city that was one of the most important cultural centres of the ancient world. From the 1st to the 2nd century, the art and architecture of Palmyra, standing at the crossroads of several civilizations, married Graeco-Roman techniques with local traditions and Persian influences.

UNESCO created the idea of World Heritage to protect sites of outstanding universal value as part of its mandate to protect heritage and support for cultural diversity.

Ban urges borders and ports be kept open to thousands stranded at sea in Southeast Asia

14 May - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today expressed alarm that some Southeast Asian countries may be refusing entry to several thousand people believed to be stranded on smugglers’ boats in the Andaman Sea and Straits of Malacca, and urged leaders in the region to keep their borders and ports open.

“The Secretary-General is concerned about the crisis evolving in the Andaman Sea and Straits of Malacca, where several thousand people are believed to be stranded on smugglers’ boats,” said a statement issued through his spokesperson. “He is alarmed by reports that some countries may be refusing entry to boats carrying refugees and migrants.”

In the statement, Mr. Ban also urged governments in the region to ensure that the obligation of rescue at sea is upheld and the prohibition on ‘refoulement’ is maintained. Refoulement is the forcible return of individuals to their country of origin where they could face persecution.

The Secretary-General “also urges Governments to facilitate timely disembarkation and keep their borders and ports open in order to help the vulnerable people who are in need,” the statement said.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has also expressed alarm at reports suggesting that Indonesia and Malaysia may have pushed back boats carrying vulnerable people from Myanmar and Bangladesh.
UNHCR said it has asked countries in Southeast Asia to approach this issue as a regional one with real human consequences and has offered to support States to interview the different groups and to help target solutions to their specific needs, as those being rescued are likely to be a mix of refugees, economic migrants, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied and separated children among those being smuggled.

In his statement today, the Secretary-General said he “has taken note of the efforts to organize a regional summit and calls on all leaders of Southeast Asia to intensify individual and collective efforts to address this worrying situation and tackle the root causes, of which the push factors are often human rights violations.”

“In this regard, he reminds States of their obligations under international law; he emphasizes the need for a timely, comprehensive, rights-based, predictable and effective response,” according to the statement.

**At Security Council, UN officials warn against ‘waning’ global attention to plight of civilians in Iraq**

*14 May -* The complexities and complications surrounding the plight of civilians in Iraq remain “enormous” amid slow political progress and ongoing violence throughout the country, a senior United Nations official warned today as he urged the international community to support the Gulf State’s efforts towards stability and peace.

“Iraq is temporarily unable to cope alone with the challenges of the security and humanitarian crisis and stabilisation and rehabilitation efforts,” UN Special Representative for Iraq Ján Kubiš told the Security Council in a briefing this morning.

“Unfortunately, however critical is the urgency of continuous and massive support for Iraq, the international community’s response is grossly insufficient, as if the existence of other old and new crises were enough to excuse a waning attention to the plight of Iraq and its people.”

Upstaged by other regional conflicts which have distracted the international community, the conflict in Iraq continues to smoulder as Iraqi Government forces clash with militants aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, in battles over the country’s territory.

Mr. Kubiš, who is also head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) was appointed to his role in late February, explained that vast areas of Iraq and millions of Iraqis remained under ISIL control and influence, subjected to the extremist group’s radical ideology as well as “horrendous crimes and human rights violations.”

“It is important that local fighters and authorities are properly empowered to take their share of responsibility for the liberation from ISIL and for holding and governing of their areas,” the Special Representative continued. “All that, and notably military supplies and assistance, must be coordinated with and sanctioned by the respective authorities of the State.”

The military option, however, could only be part of the overall solution to bringing Iraq back from the brink, Mr. Kubiš added. For any military gains to be sustainable, the Government in Baghdad would have to “restore the confidence of disaffected communities” and restore civilian responsibility for security and the rule of law in liberated areas. Above all, the establishment of a transparent political process would be fundamental towards the creation of a peaceful and stable future.

“Political processes, national reconciliation efforts are essential to the underlying challenges facing Iraq and its unity creating sustainable solutions for peaceful co-existence, cooperation and development of Iraq’s diverse components,” he said. “These efforts towards political dialogue must also be accompanied by efforts to promote reconciliation at the community level.”

Against that backdrop, the international community’s assistance for Iraq and its people – through “continuous and long-term adequate political, financial, and material support” – remain critical if the country is to turn its opportunities into reality, according to Mr. Kubiš.
Such assistance will be particularly important if the country is to recover from its brimming humanitarian crisis.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), nearly 7 million people, or 20 per cent of the population, are unable to access essential health services, water and sanitation services due to the country’s conflict. Food insecurity, meanwhile, has increased by 60 per cent in six months with 4.4 million people now requiring food assistance. And over 1 million of the 2.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq need shelter.

Addressing the 15-member Council this morning, OCHA chief Valerie Amos also cautioned delegates that as the duration and scale of the Iraq crisis increased, so did its urgency and the need for international assistance, particularly as the humanitarian situation had now become “deeply worrying.”

“We must do more to protect Iraqi civilians from these rising levels of violence,” Ms. Amos affirmed. “We must work to expand the assistance provided to affected people in all parts of the country.”

She told the Council that she is “extremely concerned” about the wellbeing of the millions of Iraqis who live in areas outside Government control, including under ISIL control. Next month will mark one year since the attack on Mosul and the spread of ISIL in the country.

“Reports indicate deteriorating conditions in these areas, including diminishing access to clean water, medical care, and food,” she said, underscoring that most of these areas remain largely out of the reach of humanitarian organizations.

Ms. Amos, who is also the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, observed that as funding shortfalls were restricting the UN’s ability to scale up assistance, access and negotiation teams were nonetheless on the ground working to expand the reach of relief efforts.

“Addressing humanitarian needs in Iraq requires collective action,” she declared. “A new Humanitarian Response Plan will be released in Brussels on 4 June and I hope donors will give generously.”

**Haiti: senior UN official says cholera outbreak needs ‘urgent attention’**

14 May - The cholera outbreak in Haiti remains the largest in recent world history, according to the United Nations official coordinating the Organization’s cholera response in the country, yet the health crisis has fallen off the international agenda after having ceased appearing in the media.

“When cooperation funds dry up, the response teams on the ground no longer have resources to adequately respond to alerts, treat patients and prevent further deaths,” wrote Pedro Medrano Rojas, the Senior Coordinator for the Cholera Response in Haiti, in an opinion piece published in *Wiener Zeitung*.

Mr. Medrano said the epidemic has caused 9,000 deaths and affected over 735,000 people since October 2010 when the outbreak began in the aftermath of the earthquake.

“Engraved in our memories are dreadful images of dilapidated buildings and people trying to survive in the midst of the disaster,” he said. “And we can also remember the outstanding international mobilization, committed both to reconstructing the country and fighting the cholera epidemic that emerged months later.”

He said it was understandable that television cameras were now in Nepal, where an earthquake similar to the one in Haiti had occurred.

“But we cannot forget cholera,” he said. “The cholera epidemic in Haiti is still a humanitarian emergency that requires urgent attention. How would we react if any other country forecasted 28,000 cases of cholera for 2015?”
That World Health Organization (WHO) forecast could be even worse if efforts were not made to correct the course and Mr. Medrano said the latest UN cholera fact sheet revealed that the situation is going through its worst moment in the last three years.

Heavy rains in September 2014 combined with the lack of resources for an appropriate response reversed previous declines, he said, adding that since then Cholera cases “skyrocketed” from approximately a thousand per month to nearly a thousand per week, with 113 people dying between January and March.

“Despite the alarming situation and the worrying estimates for 2015, the cholera epidemic has fallen off the radar of most donors,” Mr. Medrano said. “The lack of resources has already led to the closure of 91 of the 250 treatment centres in the country and has caused the departure of many international partners from the country.”

He said the humanitarian community needed $36 million to secure the response capacity and he stressed that the disease was “easily treatable” through antibiotics and hydration.

“No one should die from cholera in the twenty-first century,” Mr. Medrano continued. “But Haiti is at a disadvantage, as the poorest country in Latin America and one of the poorest in the entire world. Its health system is very limited and its national sanitation system barely covers one in every four people.”

He pointed to the many positive results in Haiti stemming from international cooperation, including a huge drop in the number of displaced persons, an 88 per cent increase in primary school attendance and the reaching of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on underweight children in 2012.

“Cholera in Haiti can be eliminated,” he said. “We have the strategies, roadmaps and coordination mechanisms with the Government in place to do so. What we need now is a stronger commitment of the international cooperation. Stopping our support now will risk losing everything.”

**In Geneva, UN envoy on Syria meets with officials from the Russian Federation and United Kingdom**

Briefing journalists in New York, Stéphane Dujarric, the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, said that, Mr. de Mistura also received the envoy of the Syrian National Coalition of Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, Haitham al-Maleh, who delivered a letter from the Coalition explaining and elaborating his Organization’s position on the way to resolve the conflict in Syria.

According to Mr. Dujarric, the Special Envoy encouraged continued contribution by the Coalition to the Geneva consultations and also discussed perspectives on a political solution to the Syrian conflict with Syrian activist Samir Al-Taqi, currently the General Director of the Orient Research Centre in Dubai.

At the end of the day’s meetings, Mr. de Mistura said the rich discussions with Syrian and international interlocutors were another stark reminder of a shared sense of urgency to help Syrian people reach a political solution to the end the conflict.

The talks are aimed to bolster implementation of the Geneva Communiqué, which was adopted after the first international meeting on the issue on 30 June 2012, and since endorsed by the UN Security Council.

The document lays out key steps in a process to end the violence. Among others, it calls for the establishment of a transitional governing body, with full executive powers and made up by members of the present Government and the opposition and other groups, as part of agreed principles and guidelines for a Syrian-led political transition.
UN-facilitated accord leads to release of some 350 children in Central African Republic

14 May - In the single largest release of children associated with armed groups in the Central African Republic since violence erupted there some two years ago, some 350 children have been freed following an agreement facilitated by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) that will allow them and thousands of others to reclaim their lives and resume their childhood.

“Three separate ceremonies were held today near the town of Bambari during which 357 children were released by anti-Balaka militias and the ex-Séléka armed group,” the UN children’s fund UNICEF said in a press release.

More than two years of civil war and sectarian violence have displaced thousands of people in the Central African Republic (CAR) amid ongoing clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka alliance and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian. The UN estimates that some 450,000 people remain displaced inside the country while thousands of others have sought asylum across the borders.

“After two years of heavy fighting, the release of children by these groups – on the same day – is a real step towards peace,” said Mohamed Malick Fall, UNICEF’s Representative, who attended today’s ceremonies. ”Violence and suffering can now give way to a brighter future for children.”

“This was the start of a process that we hope will result in the release of thousands of children associated with armed groups in the Central African Republic,” Mr. Fall added.

UNICEF estimates that between 6,000 and 10,000 children are currently connected with the country’s armed factions. This figure includes children serving as combatants, others who are being used for sexual purposes, and those working as cooks, messengers and in other roles.

Today’s events represent the single largest release of children associated with armed groups in the Central African Republic since violence erupted in 2012, according to UNICEF.

The agreement by the leaders of CAR’s 10 armed groups to release children in their ranks was signed during a national reconciliation forum held in the capital Bangui last week as the result of collaboration among UNICEF, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the Government of the Central African Republic.

The agreement also commits the groups to ending additional child recruitment and gives UNICEF and its partners immediate and unrestricted access to the areas under the groups’ control in order to identify and verify the number of affected children and to secure their release.

The released children received medical screenings and had the opportunity to speak with trained social workers, according to the UN agency. And when security conditions permit, children with relatives in the area will be reunited with their families while others will be placed with foster-caregivers until their families can be located.

“Each of them will require extensive support and protection so that they can rebuild their lives and resume their childhood,” the agency said.

UNICEF said that the process of releasing and reintegrating the children will place additional demands on the already limited funding available to respond to the humanitarian emergency in the country. UNICEF has received only $17 million...
out of the $73.9 million required.

**Ban kicks off meeting to boost commitment to ‘Every Woman, Every Child’ initiative**

14 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has gathered senior leaders from around the world for a meeting that began today in New York on ways to step-up commitments to improve the health of women, children and adolescents globally under a United Nations initiative.

“Women, children and adolescents are the most powerful drivers of transformative and sustainable change,” said Mr. Ban ahead of the retreat, which has been organized in the context of the *Every Woman, Every Child* initiative. “Within a generation, we have the historical opportunity to create a world where women, children and adolescents not only survive preventable causes, but thrive to their fullest potential.”

The two-day retreat brings together Government representatives, CEOs, civil society leaders, private sector partners, global advocates and heads of UN agencies to prepare new commitments to mobilize action to ensure support for women, children and adolescents’ health in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

*Every Woman, Every Child* is a movement to mobilize and intensify global action to improve the health of women and children around the world. It is aimed at putting into action the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health and is the fastest growing partnership in history on public health.

A total of $34 billion in resources have already been disbursed, translating into concrete action on the ground, such as greater prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission, better access to oral rehydration therapy, as well as improvement of professional maternity care, family planning, childhood vaccinations, and prenatal and postnatal care.

“Improving the health and well-being of women, children and adolescents everywhere is one of the best investments we can make,” said Mr. Ban.

It is estimated that the lives of 2.4 million women and children have been saved in the 49 countries targeted by the movement, but accelerating progress is crucial as millions more continue to suffer and die from preventable causes. To ensure reduction in the number of maternal and under-five children deaths, political support is required at the highest level, especially as the new development agenda is being negotiated.

At a luncheon held in New York today ahead of the retreat, the Secretary-General described how his advisors had overwhelmingly looked to improving women’s and children’s health as a route to having a broad impact on enhancing achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

“What was astonishing to me then is that they said we already knew the solutions, but we did not have the resources, commitment or coordination to make an impact,” said Mr. Ban. “I am so glad that I can stand here today and say that we are turning the tide.”

He stressed his pride in the achievements made under the ‘Every Woman, Every Child’ initiative but noted that the progress seen was “fragile” and said the Global Strategy would be updated to align with the sustainable development goals.

“The updated Global Strategy will place new attention on adolescents’ needs, inequalities, and how to respond more effectively in humanitarian crises and fragile settings,” said Mr. Ban.

“It will aim to build the resilience of health systems, improve the quality of health services and equity in their coverage. It will examine how to work more effectively with key health-enhancing sectors, such as education, nutrition, sustainable energy, water and sanitation. And it will be backed-up with concrete action and financing at all levels and from all stakeholders.”
He said that a Global Financing Facility to support of the initiative would be launched in July, adding that a high-level Advisory Group for ‘Every Woman, Every Child’ and the updated Global Strategy was also about to start work with the aim of inspiring ambitious action that translates into steady progress on the ground.

“Let us remember, we are all accountable to every woman, every child,” he said. “Every woman, every child is a health worker going the extra mile to save a life. It is a politician, a business person, it is an educator. It is your mother or father, brother or sister.”

**UN refugee chief visits Kenya and Somalia to discuss future of Dadaab camp**

**14 May** - The United Nations refugee chief has completed a visit to Kenya and Somalia where he held successful meetings with the Presidents of both countries and discussed issues related to refugees and returnees, particularly regarding the hundreds of thousands of people in Dadaab camp.

“We reached a common understanding with the Presidents of Kenya and Somalia on three things,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres in Nairobi. “Firstly, the need to ensure return from Dadaab is voluntary and that it takes place in safety and dignity, and in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement; secondly, on cooperation to boost security in Dadaab; and thirdly, the expansion of additional areas for people to return to in Somalia.”

Mr. Guterres expressed deep appreciation to President of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta for his "courage and wisdom" in handling the refugee situation, even as emotions in the country run high following the attack on Garissa University.

Shortly after that 2 April assault on the campus, for which Somali-based Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility and which reportedly left scores of people dead, the High Commissioner’s Office (UNHCR) urged Kenyan authorities to reconsider their decision to shut down within the next three months Dadaab refugee camp, which lies along Kenya’s border with Somalia.

Following the recent visit, which wrapped up on 9 May, UNHCR said Mr. Kenyatta was committed to the aim of making return to Somalia an attractive and sustainable option for those in Kenya, while Mr. Guterres said he would mobilize the international community to boost security in Dadaab, where nearly 350,000 people are living.

Mr. Guterres also met Somalia’s President, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, as well as Prime Minister Sharmarke, in Mogadishu where the possible future return of Somali refugees in Kenya was also discussed.

He also travelled to Kismayo, in south central Somalia, which is a key refugee return destination. There he met regional leader Ahmed Madobe and discussed scaling up the current voluntary return project and ensuring that returns are sustainable.

To enable people to return, investment needed to be scaled up to improve socio-economic conditions for refugees, displaced people and local communities. Mr. Guterres said he would mobilize the international community to improve access to shelter, education, health and other basic services as create realistic livelihood opportunities.

While in Kenya, the High Commissioner also visited Dadaab, camp where he met with local officials, refugees and host communities. He condemned the Garissa attack noting that the entire region has suffered the effects of terrorism and reiterated commitment to strengthen security in Dadaab.

“It is in the interests of the international community to support the Government of Kenya to protect its citizens and the refugees it has so generously received,” he said. “I’ve seen babies who have been born from parents who have been born in Dadaab. This is not how we want people to live.”
He noted that around 2,000 refugees had returned to Luuq, Baidoa and Kismayo in Somalia with the support of UNHCR since the Tripartite Agreement and he said improvements in basic conditions would help to boost those numbers exponentially.

In the meantime, Mr. Guterres told refugees in Dadaab that he had received reassurance from the Kenyan Government that any future returns to Somalia would be fully voluntary and in line with the provisions of the Tripartite Agreement.

"UNHCR and the Governments of Kenya and Somalia will organize an International Conference of Solidarity, to raise the required funding to multiply areas inside Somalia where capacity to receive returnees will be boosted through a portfolio of projects," he said.

**Yemen: UN chief hails important humanitarian pause as critical aid reaches civilians**

14 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has spotlighted the importance of Yemen's humanitarian ceasefire as the United Nations and its partners ramp up critical relief efforts to civilian populations in need, according to a spokesperson for the Organization.

Addressing a press briefing, UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told reporters that the Secretary-General had spoken to Khaled Mahfoudh Abdullah Bahah, the Vice President and Prime Minister of Yemen, by phone earlier in the day and reportedly emphasized the need to fully operationalise the humanitarian pause in effect throughout the country. Mr. Dujarric further explained that Mr. Ban had noted is mobilization of the whole UN humanitarian system to support the Yemeni people.

Moreover, the spokesperson said the Secretary-General restated that there is no military solution to Yemen's ongoing conflict and that, to that end, he would soon convene a meeting of Yemeni parties in a third country, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2216.

Against that backdrop, in a separate statement marking the end of his visit to the Gulf nation, the UN's Special Envoy on Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, today welcomed the recently established five-day humanitarian truce in the country but noted with concern reports of “sporadic violations” in some areas.

He urged all parties to fully adhere to the agreed cessation of hostilities from the remainder of the ceasefire in order to facilitate the delivery of “urgently needed life-saving assistance.”

“Yemenis throughout the country have faced tragic levels of suffering and violence over recent months,” Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed declared. “The humanitarian pause is important to give them time to seek medical assistance and receive much-needed humanitarian assistance which so far has been unable to reach most Yemenis.”

The Special Envoy also called on all sides to refrain from any actions that would undermine the safety and security of Yemen's transportation infrastructure, including seaports and airports – both critical to facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid. In addition, he encouraged “the lifting of the current blockade to enable the import of fuel, food and medicines.”

Following his visit to Yemen, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed will now continue his consultations in the region as part of his efforts to ensure that the international community remain focused on helping Yemen build a peaceful future.

Since the Yemen conflict erupted in mid-March 2015, over 1,400 people have been killed and close to 6,000 people injured, roughly half of whom have been civilians. Civilians across the border in Saudi Arabia's frontier towns have been caught up in the fighting as well.

Meanwhile, Yemen was already in a precarious state prior to the explosion of violence with the current fighting only fuelling concerns in the humanitarian community that the country would grow increasingly food insecure.
A 2014 World Food Programme (WFP) food security survey found that 10.6 million people – 41 percent of the population – were food insecure with more than five million people severely food insecure – in need of food assistance. The current conflict will exacerbate the precarious food security situation because the country imports more than 90 percent of its food needs.

In the latest situation report from the ground, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) confirmed that relief efforts during the first 24 hours of the humanitarian pause were primarily directed towards re-supplying and pre-positioning stocks while mobile medical teams travelled to affected areas in Amran, Hajjah and Hudaydah.

The UN's relief arm added that two ships carrying 420,000 litres of fuel for humanitarian operations have been docked in Hudaydah since 9 May and that the fuel was now being distributed to 50 humanitarian partners to support life-saving operations. Partners estimate that operations require 5 million litres of fuel every month.

At the same time, telecommunications networks continue to face “serious problems” as an estimated 70 per cent of phone calls fail to go through, especially in Aden and Sa'ada, where communications are “nearly impossible.”

### South Sudan: UN ramps up airlifts to reach conflict-hit farmers ahead of planting season

14 May - As the main planting season begins in South Sudan, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has announced today that it is accelerating its efforts to get vital seeds, tools and other materials to some of the country's most vulnerable farmers.

"We have a small window to provide farmers with the inputs they need to start planting," Karim Bah, FAO's Emergency Response Manager in South Sudan, said in a statement.

"For many farmers, this is the only opportunity to plant cereals this year," added Serge Tissot, FAO's acting representative in South Sudan. "Without seeds now, they will have to wait another year to plant and that means they won't see another cereal harvest until the end of 2016."

With up to 18 flights loaded with seeds, tools and fishing kits leaving Juba each day, FAO is working to get these materials into farmers' hands in time for planting in conflict-hit areas of Upper Nile and Jonglei states, where hunger and malnutrition levels are particularly high.

In the last few days, almost 100 tonnes of inputs have been flown from Juba to local airstrips, representing just a portion of those destined to reach over 175,000 food-insecure farming families in Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei by the end of May.

The current wave of fighting comes at a crucial time for farmers who have depleted their food stocks and have only the next few weeks to plant their crops. The airlifts are just one part of FAO's wider efforts to provide conflict-affected and food-insecure families in South Sudan with a means to produce their own food and build more resilient livelihoods.

FAO aims to support 2.8 million people throughout South Sudan in 2015 by providing a combination of vegetable, crop and fishing kits, as well as other kinds of support.

Crop kits contain at least three cereal seeds (sorghum, cowpea, maize, groundnut and sesame) and are sufficient to plant 1.3 hectares per family. Recipient households can be expected to harvest 1 360 kg of cereals in September/October, enough to feed their families for five months.

FAO has also been carrying out widespread livestock vaccination campaigns during the dry season, targeting animals based in the cattle camps before they start migrating as the rains begin.

"So far, we have reached 2 million animals in 2015, protecting the main social and economic asset of hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese agropastoralists, as well as safeguarding public health from the spread of animal diseases," said Mr.
As part of FAO's efforts to control livestock disease outbreaks, the Organization has facilitated a meeting between the veterinary authorities of Uganda and South Sudan to discuss cooperation for the control and prevention of transboundary animal diseases.

**UN mission in Afghanistan condemns killing of 17 civilians by Taliban**

**14 May** - The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has strongly condemned yesterday's killing of at least 17 civilians in two separate attacks for which the Taliban has claimed responsibility.

An attack against civilians gathered for a cultural event in the Park Palace hotel in Kabul killed 14 civilians and injured several others, according to a press statement released from UNAMA today.

A further three civilians were killed and another two injured in an attack on the Department of Haj and Religious Endowment in Lashkargah in Helmand.

“These deliberate attacks on civilians are atrocities,” said Georgette Gagnon, UNAMA's Human Rights Director, extending condolences to the families of those killed and injured.

“Taliban statements on avoiding civilian casualties ring hollow when we set them against the latest killings. The Taliban should abide by their commitments and immediately stop deliberately attacking civilians,” Ms. Gagnon added.

In the first four months of 2015, UNAMA documented a record high number of 2,937 civilian casualties (974 civilian deaths and 1,963 injured), a 16 percent increase over the same period in 2014.

“With this year's appalling rise in civilian casualties, UNAMA again urges parties to the conflict to take all necessary measures to protect civilians in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law,” Ms. Gagnon said.

UNAMA highlighted that international humanitarian law, which binds all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan including the Taliban, prohibits attacks against civilians and civilian locations, such as civilian government offices and hotels, at any time and in any place whatsoever. Such acts may amount to war crimes.

**New UN report calls for economic inclusivity to drive growth in Asia-Pacific region**

**14 May** - While developing economies in the Asia-Pacific region continue to fare well in comparison to the rest of the world, structural weaknesses, like infrastructure shortages and excessive dependence on commodities will continue to hamper their growth potential, a new United Nations report on the region says, calling for greater economic inclusivity if sustainable development is to succeed.

“To enhance well-being, countries need to go beyond just focusing on 'inequality of income' and instead promote 'equality of opportunities,'” said Shamshad Akhtar, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on the launch in Bangkok today of the 2015 economic and social survey of the region, Making Growth More Inclusive for Sustainable Development.

In the report's preface, she notes that as the international community transitions globally from the landmark Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to a more ambitious path of sustainable growth and development, inclusiveness must be
integrated and mainstreamed in policymaking. Indeed, ESCAP’s 2015 Survey for the region underscores the need for the adoption of policies necessary for inclusive growth, which is both a prerequisite for meeting the outstanding MDG commitments and critical for effective implementation of an ambitious sustainable development agenda in the post-2015 era.

Ms. Akhtar stressed the need to promote quality growth and shared prosperity, calling on regional policymakers to integrate and mainstream inclusive growth. Inclusiveness, she said, requires continued stability and sustainable growth.

“Adopting ESCAP’s new multidimensional Index will assist policymakers to better review and monitor progress on inclusive growth,” Ms. Akhtar explained, referring to the Commission’s newly introduced Index of Inclusiveness, which provides indicators on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development and seeks to enable a more comprehensive analysis of inclusiveness.

According to the report, the Asia-Pacific growth trajectory, while encouraging in some areas, lags behind in others, and is in a process of adjustment in major economies of the region. Augmenting and enhancing inclusiveness will only be achieved if accompanied by a multidimensional strategy that recognizes the need for simultaneous advances in the economic, social and environmental aspects of development.

Despite the challenges, the Survey shows developing economies in the Asia-Pacific region will continue to perform well compared to the rest of the world. Growth in the region’s developing economies, at 5.9 per cent, will remain at a similar rate in 2015 compared to 2014, when the figure was 5.8 per cent, while inflation should remain low thanks to low international oil prices.

According to the report, the region stands out for its economic growth achievements, albeit in a somewhat uneven manner. Real incomes per capita in developing economies of the region have doubled on average since the early 1990s. Particularly impressive is a seven fold increase in real income per capita in China since 1990, as well as its tripling in Bhutan, Cambodia and Viet Nam over the same period.

Besides other policies, this economic growth performance has helped lift millions of people out of extreme poverty— ahead of the 2015 MDG deadline – and reduced by half the proportion of people whose income is less than $1 a day.

The Survey found significant reductions in extreme poverty alongside rising income inequality, particularly in urban areas of developing countries, while growth in the availability of productive and decent employment would remain low. Progress was also needed in boosting equality of opportunity, especially for women and girls, by broadening access to quality education and adequate health care.

The report also highlighted some of the critical policy issues for subregions, including excessive dependence on natural resources and worker remittances for economic growth in North and Central Asia, as well as employment and climate-related challenges in Pacific island developing countries. Macroeconomic imbalances and severe power shortages are key concerns in South and South-West Asia, along with weaknesses in infrastructure and skilled labour shortages in South-East Asia.

As illustrated by the recent earthquake in Nepal, which provided a fresh reminder of how natural disasters can reverse economic and social gains, with massive loss of life and livelihoods, the region would remain susceptible to risks and uncertainties. As well as the danger posed by natural disasters, fresh bouts of financial market volatility, delays in addressing structural impediments, and political disruptions also posed threats.

In pursuit of such inclusive growth, Ms. Akhtar also urged Asia-Pacific Governments to focus on domestic resource mobilization, from national budgets to the private sector.

“While traditional sources of finance such as tax revenues and official development assistance are important, in order to bridge the wide financing gap, efforts to deepen the region’s capital markets and engage the private sector must be intensified,” she said.