In the headlines:

- Ban hails Paris climate accord as ‘health insurance policy for the planet’
- With high-level forum, UN Assembly aims to narrow digital divide, harness power of information technology
- Referendum held in much of Central African Republic despite disruptions – UN peacekeeping chief
- 2 billion move out of extreme poverty over 25 years – UN flagship development report
- Syria crisis a ‘blot on our collective conscience’ UN relief chief says, urging sustained aid access, funding
- Some 1.8 million newborn deaths a year in South-East Asia are preventable – UN health agency
- UN agencies relaunch winter aid programme to support vulnerable Syrian children in Jordan
- In Kabul, UN political chief pledges continued support for Afghanistan
- COP21: UN chief hails new climate change agreement as ‘monumental triumph’
- New UN report cites civilian harm, human rights concerns in Kunduz during temporary Taliban occupation
- Afghanistan: Security Council condemns Taliban attack near Spanish embassy in Kabul
- UN calls on global community to ensure access to affordable, quality health services for all

More stories inside

Ban hails Paris climate accord as ‘health insurance policy for the planet’

14 December - Calling the Paris Agreement on climate change “a health insurance policy for the planet,” United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today he never lost faith over his nine years in office that the international community could rise to the challenge and take steps to curb emission and boost climate-resilient growth.

“The countries of the world have made a historic choice,” he told a news briefing at UN Headquarters in New York on his return from attending the so-called COP21 conference in Paris, as he called on Governments to put their pledges into action.

“They have unanimously decided to work as one to rise to the defining challenge of our times. The Paris Agreement is a victory for people, for the common good, and for multilateralism.

“It is a health insurance policy for the planet. It is the most significant action in years to uphold our Charter mandate to ‘save succeeding generations.’ For the first time, every country in the world has pledged to curb emissions, strengthen resilience and act internationally and domestically to address climate change.”

The 195 Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on Saturday adopted the Paris Agreement after two weeks of intensive negotiations at the summit.

For information media - not an official record
The accord covers all crucial areas identified as essential for a landmark conclusion: mitigation – reducing emissions fast enough to achieve the temperature goal; a transparency system and global stock-take – accounting for climate action; adaptation – strengthening ability of countries to deal with climate impacts; loss and damage – strengthening ability to recover from climate impacts; and support – including finance, for nations to build clean, resilient futures.

Mr. Ban said it embodies a successful new approach to global cooperation on climate change, with countries acknowledging that their national interest is best served by acting for the common good by transforming the global economy to low-emission, climate-resilient growth.

“It marks a decisive turning point in the global quest for a safer, more sustainable and prosperous future,” he stressed. “It will save lives, improve human well-being and promote more peaceful, stable societies.”

He highlighted the agreement as one of his top priorities since the day he became UN Secretary-General. “For nine years, I have spoken repeatedly with nearly every world leader about how the growing human imprint on the planet threatens our lives, our economies, our security and our survival. I have mobilized business and engaged civil society.

“I have never lost faith that the international community could rise to the climate challenge. Now I count on Governments, and all sectors of society, to turn these commitments into urgent, decisive action,” he concluded.

With high-level forum, UN Assembly aims to narrow digital divide, harness power of information technology

14 December - Ten years after the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society, delegates from Member States and observer entities are meeting at UN Headquarters starting tomorrow to identify emerging trends, fresh priorities and innovations for advancing information and communications technologies.

The process that began with the World Summit, known by the acronym WSIS, “is where the real grassroots work is being done. It is where people gather if they believe in effectively using ICTs [Information and Communications Technologies] for sustainable development,” said International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Secretary-General Houlin Zhao.

“WSIS has been a major driver of socio-economic development by providing a tangible, global framework for harnessing the tremendous power of ICTs and I am confident that it will play an even greater role in achieving the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” Mr. Zhao said on the eve of the so-called WSIS+10 High-Level Meeting.

The two-day meeting, convened by UN General Assembly President Mogens Lykketoft, in close collaboration with ITU and other UN agencies and programmes such as the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), is expected to result in a road map for efforts to put ICTs at the heart of new development strategies.

In addition to bridging the digital divide, the delegates will address issues of cybersecurity, Internet governance, human rights on the Internet, as well as areas of future actions to ensure a people-centred inclusive and development-oriented Information Society.

“It is the largest and most comprehensive review of the WSIS goals, targets and process since the Summit, organized by ITU in a multi-stakeholder set up, was held in two phases, in 2003 (Geneva) and 2005 (Tunis),” said the UN specialized agency, which allocates global radio spectrum and satellite orbits, develops the technical standards that ensure networks and technologies seamlessly interconnect, and strive to improve access to ICTs to underserved communities worldwide.

“The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges that global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge digital divides and to develop knowledge societies,” ITU said.
“ICTs have become an essential part of long-term social and economic development, but progress will depend on strong, resilient, available, secure and trustworthy communications infrastructure and services,” it added.

The High-Level meeting will conclude on 16 December with an outcome document which will seek to place ICTs where they can serve as an important accelerator of access to education and health care, e-government services, environmental monitoring, women’s empowerment, and more.

In other news today, UN Women and ITU will host the annual Gender Equality and Mainstreaming in Technology (GEM-TECH) Awards, which recognize the tremendous power of ICTs to transform women’s lives by providing them with better access to education, information, support networks, employment opportunities, avenues for political participation, and devices and apps that can improve personal safety.

The awards are celebrated this year as part of the 20-year commemoration of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The three GEM-TECH winners and three Global Achievers will receive their awards at a ceremony held this evening at Civic Hall in New York, in partnership with the New York City Mayor’s Office of Technology and Innovation and generously sponsored by Mozilla, Microsoft, the Swiss Federal Office of Communications, Verizon and Facebook. The awards will be presented by ITU Deputy Secretary-General, Malcolm Johnson, and UN Women Deputy Executive Director, Lakshmi Puri.

The annual WSIS Forum, to be held from 2 to 6 May 2016 in Geneva, will build on the outcome of this week’s meeting while looking toward concrete solutions strengthening the impact ICTs in advancing achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

**Referendum held in much of Central African Republic despite disruptions – UN peacekeeping chief**

**14 December** - A constitutional referendum meant to help stabilize the Central African Republic (CAR) amid conflict between Muslim and Christian factions took place successfully in the majority of the country yesterday, but violent “spoilers” disrupted the process in some areas, the top United Nations peacekeeping official reported today.

“Efforts to undermine yesterday’s constitutional referendum demonstrate that there are actors that remain determined to derail the political process,” UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous, told the Security Council, reporting that three UN peacekeepers were injured in cases of violence and intimidation in Bangui, the capital, and in Bria.

“With only two weeks until the first round of (presidential) elections, time is of the essence to further contain such attempts by the spoilers. The entire international community must remain united in its uncompromising message rejecting any attempt to derail the political process from any quarter and to demonstrate that there will be consequences for those that seek to undermine the political process,” he said.

“We must not allow attempts by a few, as demonstrated yesterday, to disrupt the hopes and aspirations of many for a successful electoral process that will return their country to constitutional order,” emphasized Mr. Ladsous.

Voting has been extended today in places where it was impeded as the electoral calendar moves into high gear to complete the transition in CAR after more than two years of fighting between the mainly Muslim Séléka and mainly Christian anti-Balaka groups. The first round of presidential and legislative elections is scheduled for 27 December.

Mr. Ladsous said efforts to undermine the referendum by elements of both groups were reported in parts of Bangui and outside, although preventive steps by the UN integrated stabilization mission in CAR, known by the French acronym MINUSCA, allowed voting to proceed in at least some polling centres in Bangui and Bria, despite localized security.
incidents.

In Birao, Bossangoa, Ndele and Kaga-Bandoro “spoilers resorted to violence and intimidation of voters and electoral staff thereby preventing the holding of the referendum despite the actions of MINUSCA,” he added.

“Looking ahead, we must be reminded that as important as they are, these elections are not an end in themselves,” he stressed. “In order to truly address the root causes of the crisis, we will need to support the new Government in working in a spirit of unity, inclusivity and reconciliation.’

“To address these as well as other priorities such as the humanitarian situation or economic recovery, key to the stability of the country, the sustained support of this Council and key partners will be essential. The people of the Central African Republic who have experienced such tragedy for so long deserve nothing less,” he said.

Mr. Ladsous highlighted the unprecedented registration of nearly two million voters, 95 per cent of the estimated electorate, demonstrating “the strong desire for change,” and vowed that MINUSCA and the UN system will continue technical, logistical and security support.

He noted that Pope Francis’s visit to Bangui last month brought new hope for easing inter-communal tensions, citing the “remarkable image” of unity afforded by the Pope’s presence at a mosque, showing that religion is not at the heart of the country’s challenges.

He pledged MINUSCA’s continued commitment to a “robust posture” to protect civilians and called for strong action to ensure that the perpetrators of serious human rights abuses are brought to justice.

MINUSCA, set up in April 2014 to help restore stability peace after a breakdown of governmental authority, currently maintains nearly 11,000 uniformed personnel in the country.

2 billion move out of extreme poverty over 25 years – UN flagship development report

14 December - Some 2 billion people have moved out of low human development levels in the last 25 years but in order to secure these gains and galvanize progress, a stronger focus to “act now” to provide decent work is needed, according to the new United Nations Human Development Report released today.

“This new global Human Development Report is an urgent call to tackle one of the world’s great development challenges - providing enough decent work and livelihoods for all,” UN Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Helen Clark said, launching the report at a ceremony in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The 2015 Report, Work for Human Development , an editorially independent publication of the UNDP, calls for equitable and decent work for all. In doing so, it encourages governments to look beyond jobs to consider the many kinds of work, such as unpaid care, voluntary, or creative work that are important for human development, UNDP said in a summary of the annual report.

‘Decent work’ is defined by the UN International Labour Organization (ILO) as opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.”

As for the report’s new Human Development Index (HDI), Sub-Saharan Africa continues to rank among the lowest, but 12 countries have individual HDI levels that put them in the high or medium human development group, and they are: Botswana, Cabo Verde, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles,
and Zambia.

The Index is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living.

The countries with the steepest drops in HDI rank in 2014 were reported as Libya, which slipped 27 places and Syria, which slipped 15 places.

The top five countries in rank order of HDI are: Norway, Australia, Switzerland, Denmark and Netherlands, with no changes from 2014.

The bottom five countries in rank order of HDI are: Niger, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Chad, and Burundi.

The report’s lead author Selim Jahan said: “Human progress will accelerate when everyone who wants to work has the opportunity to do so under decent circumstances. Yet in many countries, people are often excluded from paid work, or are paid less than others for doing work of the same value.”

The report released today said “with better health and education outcomes and reductions in extreme poverty, 2 billion people have moved out of low human development levels in the last 25 years, the report says.”

However, 830 million people are still classified as working poor, living on under $2.00 a day, and more than 200 million people – including 74 million youth – are unemployed, while 21 million people are currently in forced labour, according to the report.

The report also presented a detailed new estimate of the share of all work, not just paid work, between men and women. While women carry out 52 percent of all work, “glaring inequalities” remain.

“Women are less likely to be paid for their work than men, with three out of every four hours of unpaid work carried out by women,” it said. “In contrast, men account for two of every three hours of paid work. When women are paid, they earn globally, on average, 24 percent less than men, and occupy less than a quarter of senior business positions worldwide,” added the report.

The report noted that despite new opportunities, more jobs are now becoming vulnerable and a wide digital divide remains.

The report also said that work opportunities can be fostered by the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, it said, that around 45 million additional health workers will be needed to meet the health objectives of the global goals that would see the global health workforce increase in size from 34 million in 2012 to 79 million by 2030.

**Syria crisis a ‘blot on our collective conscience’ UN relief chief says, urging sustained aid access, funding**

**14 December** - Speaking from Damascus today, the top United Nations relief official said the situation in Syria is “unacceptable,” with nearly 13.5 million Syrians in need for some form of assistance, and he urged the international community to generously support the UN’s $3.2 billion humanitarian operations plan for the war-torn country.

“I came to Syria to find ways to improve the ongoing response efforts and to ensure that those in need across the country will receive the assistance they so desperately require,” said UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien at the end of his second visit to Syria.

He told reports that the UN and its partners have finalized the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016, which requires $3.2 billion for 13.5 million Syrians; including nearly 6.5 million
who are internally displaced, about 72 per cent of the population that is without access to drinking water and an estimated 2 million children who are out of school.

“This situation is unacceptable; a blot on our collective conscience,” underscored Mr. O’Brien, who is also the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator.

He went on to say that during his trip, which began on 12 December, he had been able to visit Homs City, where he crossed conflict lines to visit communities in the Al Waer neighbourhood where the parties recently agreed a cessation of hostilities.

“This agreement has allowed the UN and our partners, chiefly the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to deliver, during my visit, life-saving assistance to communities who have not received aid since January 2015,” said Mr. O’Brien.

Satisfied with the accessibility to Al Waer, he noted however that people in many other similar places across Syria continue to be deprived of assistance and suffer from the consequences of the “brutal” crisis and added that sustained humanitarian access must reach all people in need, “with or without local agreement.”

Some 4.5 million people continue to live in areas that are hard to reach for the humanitarian community. Almost 400,000 of those are besieged. Between January and November, the UN and partners were only able to reach 1.5 per cent people in need in besieged areas, and 7 per cent of the people in need in hard to reach areas, Mr. O’Brien explained, adding that allowing access to humanitarian supplies is the obligation of all those who are party to the conflict.

On his visit to a children’s hospital in Al Waer, he said that the severely damaged facility now treats patients of all ages, and after talking to the injured, he “witnessed first-hand the resilience of the Syrian people.”

Mr. O’Brien said he also visited a former school which is now being used as a shelter by 45 displaced families. The school had been had been hit by mortars many times, severely injuring some children during the attacks.

“The situation remains fragile and even during my visit a car bomb exploded near the al-Zahra area in Homs City, a devastating attack that was claimed by [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL], killing and injuring many innocent people,” said Mr. O’Brien.

Highlighting the aerial attacks that reportedly hit a school in Douma, Eastern Ghouta yesterday and the mortar attack in the Ain Karsh area of Damascus city, which killed a child and injured several others, he said this is a “tragic reminder of the urgency of finding a political solution and securing a nation-wide cease-fire.”

“Such indiscriminate attacks are unacceptable and we must do our utmost to protect innocent citizens, including women and children, against such atrocities. I continue to call on all parties to respect international humanitarian and human rights laws,” he stressed.

Further, Mr. O’Brien said that he had constructive meetings with the Governor of Homs, Talal Barazi, and local community leaders, to discuss ways to build on the cessation of hostilities agreement in order to enable relief workers to reach more people in need, regardless of where they are, while emphasizing the importance of implementing the next phases of the reconciliation agreement.

Upon meeting the President of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), Dr. Abdul Rahman Al Attar, Mr. O’Brien saluted the huge efforts and courage of SARC and their volunteers in delivering life-saving aid and persevering in the challenging and often dangerous circumstances in which we all operate, and added that they are a “valued partner” in humanitarian operations in Syria.

“Despite the challenges on the ground the humanitarian community continues to reach millions of people in Syria every month. However, much more is needed […] Syrians need our support more than ever and we must not let them down,” stressed Mr. O’Brien.

Lastly, he said that there is a desperate need for additional funds in order to continue humanitarian efforts and he expressed
hope that the international community will pledge generously at the London Syria Conference on 4 February 2016.

**Some 1.8 million newborn deaths a year in South-East Asia are preventable – UN health agency**

14 December - Nearly 7,400 newborns die every day in South-East Asia, causing untold misery to mothers and families, yet two thirds can be saved with proven cost-effective measures, the United Nations health agency said today, calling on Governments to act urgently against a scourge that kills 2.7 million newborns annually.

“Scaling up interventions with good quality care around the time of childbirth and during the first days after birth can substantially prevent complications and infections in newborns, which are the main causes of new-born deaths,” UN World Health Organization (WHO) South-East Asia Regional Director Poonam Khetrapal Sing stressed in Delhi, as health partners signed a pledge to reduce such deaths.

The pledge calls for increasing the health workforce – doctors, nurses and specially midwives – which remains critically low in much of the region, below WHO’s target of 23 per 10,000 people, as well as mobilizing sufficient funding and accessing hitherto unreached populations.

The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), World Bank, Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), led by WHO, pledged to jointly support the accelerated reduction in newborn deaths by ensuring equitable access to life-saving interventions for mothers and babies.

Dr. Khetrapal Singh said each preventable death should be accounted for. Countries should review maternal and newborn deaths to improve health services to prevent such deaths.

New-born deaths account for more than 50 per cent of the regional mortality of children under five, and remain a major factor for South-East Asia not achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of reducing under-five deaths by two thirds by the end of this year.

The region accounts for 30 per cent of global newborn deaths with Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal as the high-burden countries.

The agencies pledged to address underlying factors like health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, and highlighted the importance of investing more in early childhood development and adolescent health.

Dr. Khetrapal Singh noted that the region made significant progress in reducing under-five deaths, which dropped by 64 per cent from 118 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 43 per 1,000 in 2015, but reduction in new-born deaths was slower at 55 per cent, from 53 per 1,000 to 34 per 1,000.

WHO has set up a Technical Advisory Group of 12 eminent global and regional experts to support countries in South-East Asia. The newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals seek to reduce new-born mortality to 12 per 1,000 live births by 2030.
UN agencies relaunch winter aid programme to support vulnerable Syrian children in Jordan

14 December - As the harsh winter approaches Jordan, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) launched the winter cash assistance programme again, that will allow vulnerable Syrian families in Za’atari and Azraq camps to buy warm winter clothing for all their children.

“UNICEF’s top priority during the harsh winter months in Jordan is to ensure that vulnerable families are able to keep their children warm, healthy and active, and continue to attend schools and learning programmes,” said the UNICEF Representative, Robert Jenkins in a news release issued by WFP.

According to the news release, this is the second year that UNICEF and WFP partner to provide support to vulnerable Syrian children during the winter, which includes a one-time cash grant from UNICEF that will provide 20 Jordanian Dinars each to a total of 51,851 children under the age of 18 in the two camps.

The assistance will be delivered through electronic food vouchers (e-cards) provided by WFP to Syrian families to buy food every month and the money can be used to buy winter clothes, such as boots, gloves, trousers, coats and scarves at WFP-contracted supermarkets in the camps until mid-January 2016, said the news release.

The UN agencies said that families in the camps being informed through SMS, posters, flyers and awareness sessions with camp community leaders that the UNICEF cash assistance is for the winter needs of their children.

“Our partnership with WFP is highly significant, as it enables us to use their cost efficient e-cards to provide support to every child in the two camps this winter,” said Mr. Jenkins speaking about the UNICEF-WFP partnership.

Echoing the thoughts, WFP Jordan Country Director Mageed Yahia said that WFP is “very excited to partner with UNICEF again” especially during this crucial time.

“This collaboration demonstrates our solid commitment to the wellbeing of the children we support and brings to life WFP’s vision for stronger inter-agency partnership in Jordan,” said Mr. Yahia.

UNICEF said that it is reaching over 150,000 vulnerable children this winter in camps and host communities in Jordan with cash assistance and in-kind winter clothing in partnership with UNHCR, WFP and NGO partners.

According to WFP, through its e-card programme, the UN agency provides monthly food assistance to 523,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees in camps and communities in Jordan.

The 2015-2016 winterization programme has been made possible through the generous support from the governments of Canada, European Commission's Humanitarian aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States, according to the news release.
In Kabul, UN political chief pledges continued support for Afghanistan

14 December - During a trip to Kabul, the top United Nations political official pledged continued support to the Government and people of Afghanistan as they face several challenges, especially in the economy and in security.

Jeffrey Feltman, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, discussed yesterday in Kabul the current situation in the country with several of Afghanistan’s leaders, including President Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Hekmat Karzai.

Mr. Feltman also met with staff of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to express appreciation for their dedication throughout the past several months as Kunduz fell to anti-Government elements. In addition, he paid tribute to Toorpeki Ulfat, who was murdered in Kandahar in October, and commended her for her tireless work in human rights.

On 21 December, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom, will update the Security Council on the situation in the country. In a September briefing, he emphasized to Council members that Afghanistan’s path to stability and self-reliance could not be taken for granted, and he underscored the importance of continued international community support.

“The current refugee exodus reflects the despondency of many Afghans,” Mr. Haysom said at the time. “A clear signal of continued international support will mitigate the uncertainty fuelling this exodus.”

COP21: UN chief hails new climate change agreement as ‘monumental triumph’

12 December - Following the adoption of the new Paris Agreement on climate change, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said government representatives made history today.

“The Paris Agreement is a monumental triumph for people and our planet,” said Mr. Ban in a tweet, immediately following its adoption. “It sets the stage for progress in ending poverty, strengthening peace and ensuring a life of dignity and opportunity for all.”

Gaveling the Agreement with a green hammer, the French Foreign Minister and President of COP21, Laurent Fabius, announced the historic news – a moment greeted with loud applause and cheers, as the room stood up. Many delegates hugged, while others had tears in their eyes.

For the first time today, 195 Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – pledged to curb emissions, strengthen resilience and joined to take common climate action. This followed two weeks of tireless negotiations at the United Nations climate change conference (COP21).

The Paris Agreement and the outcomes of COP21 cover all the crucial areas identified as essential for a landmark conclusion: mitigation – reducing emissions fast enough to achieve the temperature goal; a transparency system and global stock-take – accounting for climate action; adaptation – strengthening ability of countries to deal with climate impacts; loss and damage – strengthening ability to recover from climate impacts; and support – including finance, for nations to build
clean, resilient futures.

“In the face of an unprecedented challenge, you have demonstrated unprecedented leadership,” the UN chief said taking the COP21 stage just minutes later. “You have worked collaboratively to achieve something that no one nation could achieve alone. This is a resounding success for multilateralism.”

Recalling that he made climate change one of the defining priorities of his tenure as Secretary-General, Mr. Ban said that most of all, he has listened to people – the young, the poor and the vulnerable, including indigenous peoples, from every corner of the globe.

“They seek protection from the perils of a warming planet, and the opportunity to live in a safer, more bountiful world,” he underlined. “They have demanded that world leaders act to safeguard their well-being and that of generations to come.”

Turning to the agreement itself, the Secretary-General said negotiators reached “solid results on all key points,” with an agreement that demonstrates solidarity and “is ambitious, flexible, credible and durable.”

“All countries have agreed to hold global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius. And recognizing the risk of grave consequences, you have further agreed to pursue efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5 degrees,” he announced.

In addition, a review mechanism has been established whereby every five years, beginning in 2018, Parties will regularly review what is needed in line with science.

“Governments have agreed to binding, robust, transparent rules of the road to ensure that all countries do what they have agreed across a range of issues,” Mr. Ban added.

Meanwhile, highlighting the role of the private sector, the UN chief said business leaders came to Paris in unprecedented numbers and that “powerful” climate solutions are already available while many more are to come.

“With these elements in place, markets now have the clear signal they need to unleash the full force of human ingenuity and scale up investments that will generate low-emissions, resilient growth,” he said, adding that “what was once unthinkable has now become unstoppable.”

“When historians look back on this day, they will say that global cooperation to secure a future safe from climate change took a dramatic new turn here in Paris,” Mr. Ban stated. “Today, we can look into the eyes of our children and grandchildren, and we can finally say, tell them that we have joined hands to bequeath a more habitable world to them and to future generations.”

Ending his remarks, the UN chief said that all Parties should be proud of the Paris Agreement and that “the work starts tomorrow.”

“For today, congratulations again on a job well done,” he concluded. “Let us work together, with renewed commitment, to make this a better world.”

Addressing the hundreds of delegates, Christiana Figueres, the Executive Secretary of UNFCCC, said “we did it in Paris.”

“We have made history together. It is an agreement of conviction. It is an agreement of solidarity with the most vulnerable. It is an agreement of long-term vision, for we have to turn this agreement into an engine of safe growth,” she exclaimed.

Several other top UN officials joined the Secretary-General in welcoming the new Agreement. This included the President of the UN General Assembly, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft.

“Today's agreement signals nothing less than a renaissance for humankind as we collectively embrace the global challenge of climate change and endeavor to transition to a more sustainable way of living that respects the needs of people and our planet,” Mr. Lykketoft said in a statement.
Echoing this message, the President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Oh Joon, said the world has reached a key milestone in collective action for sustainable development.

“Bold action against climate change will contribute to poverty reduction. The United Nations Economic and Social Council will take part in follow-up efforts,” he added.

Earlier today, at a meeting of the Committee of Paris [Comité de Paris] – the body which is overseeing the negotiations at COP21 – the UN chief spoke alongside the President of France, François Hollande as well Minister Fabius.

“The end is in sight. Let us now finish the job. The whole world is watching. Billions of people are relying on your wisdom,” the Secretary-General had told delegates.

In an emotional address during which he held back tears, Laurent Fabius said the agreement “will serve meaningful causes, food safety and security, public health, the fight against poverty and for essential rights, and therefore peace.”

“People worldwide, our citizens, our children, wouldn't understand if we didn't adopt it and wouldn't forgive us,” he insisted.

“It is rare to be given the opportunity to change the world,” said President François Hollande, wrapping up the meeting. “You have the opportunity to do that.”

New UN report cites civilian harm, human rights concerns in Kunduz during temporary Taliban occupation

12 December - A special report was released today by the United Nations mission in Afghanistan and the UN rights office, which documented civilian harm and human rights concerns in Kunduz, Afghanistan from 28 September to 13 October 2015 – the period covering the Taliban's attack and temporary occupation of Kunduz city, including the counter-offensive by pro-Government forces up to the point they regained control of the city.

The report titled Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Kunduz province, released jointly by UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) presents preliminary findings on arbitrary killings, abductions, assault and other forms of violence, including threats and widespread criminality, the use of child fighters during the conflict, the impact on access to education, health, and freedom of movement, according to a news release issued by UNAMA.

According to the report, civilian deaths and injuries during the reporting period and presents preliminary figure of 848 civilian casualties (289 deaths and 559 injured) that occurred in Kunduz during the reporting period and additionally it also found that vast majority of these casualties resulted from ground fighting that could not be attributed solely to one party.

The report also included the number of casualties resulting from an airstrike carried out by international military forces on a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) hospital on 3 October, which totaled 30 deaths and 37 injured.

UNAMA said that additional information on civilian casualties from the period covered by this report will be detailed in the 2015 Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, also produced jointly by UNAMA and OHCHR.

This report, UNAMA said will address key human rights concerns that arose during what was the first prolonged urban combat situation in Afghanistan since 2001, and outlines key recommendations to mitigate civilian casualties and protect civilians from harm, promote respect for international human rights and humanitarian law, and promote accountability.
Afghanistan: Security Council condemns Taliban attack near Spanish embassy in Kabul

12 December - Following the attack yesterday in the vicinity of the Embassy of Spain in Kabul, Afghanistan, which resulted in casualties from both Afghan Police and Spanish National Police, the United Nations Security Council condemned “in the strongest terms” the terrorist attack for which the Taliban has claimed responsibility.

“The members of the Security Council expressed their deep sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the people and Government of Afghanistan, as well as to the people and Government of Spain. They wished the injured a speedy recovery,” said a press statement issued by the Security Council.

The Council reiterated its serious concern at the threats posed by the Taliban, Al-Qaida, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) affiliates, and illegal armed groups to the local population, national security forces, and international presence in Afghanistan.

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

Further, the Council members reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of its motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed, and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group.

They also reaffirmed and reiterated their determination to combat by all means, in in accordance with the UN Charter and all obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and international humanitarian law, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

“The members of the Security Council reiterated that no violent or terrorist acts can reverse the path towards Afghan-led peace, democracy and stability in Afghanistan, which is supported by the people and the Government of Afghanistan and by the international community,” the statement concluded.

At the same time, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) also condemned the attacks and said this was an “attack against the international community”.

The UN mission said that the casualties of the attacks included at least two civilians with several more injured, along with extensive damage to the Embassy complex.

UNAMA stressed that civilians may never be deliberately targeted in any location as such attacks are explicitly prohibited under international humanitarian law and expressed its sincere condolences to the families of the victims and a speedy recovery to the injured.

They noted that the attack in Kabul was the second major incident within a week for which the Taliban claimed responsibility where they deliberately targeted civilians causing significant loss of civilian life.

Earlier this week, an attack occurred over a 24-hour period on 8 and 9 December in Kandahar airport where the Taliban intentionally targeted civilian areas of the base, which killed 39 civilians, including children, and a further 23 injured when
UN Daily News

12 October 2004

Taliban fighters dismounted their vehicles in the bazaar and opened fire on shopkeepers and customers.

UNAMA said that the fighting reportedly continued in the residential areas of the base accommodating the families of Afghan security forces and airport staff, and stressed that civilian relatives of military personnel can never be classified as combatants.

**UN calls on global community to ensure access to affordable, quality health services for all**

12 December - The United Nations is marking Universal Health Coverage Day with a strong call on countries to invest substantially in achieving affordable health care access worldwide to improve the lives of millions of people and contribute significantly towards achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“Our best defences against any health emergency are strong and resilient health systems that serve all people without exposing them to financial hardship.” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his message on the Day.

He recalled that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by world leaders in September, envisaged universal health coverage and other important measures to ensure that children live into adulthood, mothers survive childbirth and countries strengthen their response to infectious and non-communicable diseases.

To galvanize action on health, the UN chief noted that in September he had launched the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health. “Our aim, together with the Every Woman, Every Child movement, is to end preventable deaths among these groups and secure their well-being by helping countries to provide quality and affordable health care to all,” he explained.

The Secretary-General said that today, at least 400 million people lack access to essential health services. Every year, health care costs plunge millions of people into poverty or keep them trapped there. “That is why I call on all countries to ensure that every person could access essential and affordable health services,” he said.

“We are starting to see progress across the world as countries advance on the road towards health systems that cover all people,” he went on to note, but added that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to achieving universal health coverage and that every solution will be unique to the context.

In all cases, the UN chief stressed, success will demand substantial investments, which pay huge dividends in the form of healthier individuals, better social cohesion, greater economic prosperity, and national resilience in the face of any unexpected disease outbreak.

Mr. Ban called the world to resolve to realize this vision as part of collective efforts to enable all people to enjoy better health for generations to come.

Echoing the Secretary-General's sentiments, the Director-General of International Labor Organization (ILO), Guy Ryder, in his message for the Day, acknowledged that more should be done to ensure that every person, everywhere, has access to quality health care without suffering financial hardship.

“The ILO estimates that in 2015 more than 90 per cent of the global population living in low-income countries has no health protection and that more than half of the global rural population does not have access to needed health care. Only a fraction (5.6 per cent) of the world's older population benefits from universal health and long-term care,” Mr. Ryder said.

As such, the role of universal health coverage in poverty reduction can be significant. “Well-designed universal health protection, in conjunction with national social protection floors, alleviates the burden caused by ill health. Health protection coverage also reduces the indirect costs of disease and disability,” he said.
At the same time, Mr. Ryder stressed that health protection could be a source of employment opportunities. Based on the data from the ILO, the world is short some 10.3 million health workers. Filling this gap has the potential to provide decent jobs and stimulate economic activity in related sectors.

In conclusion, the ILO chief emphasized: “Universal health coverage will improve the lives of millions and contribute significantly towards achieving the goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

For his part, UN General Assembly President Mogens Lykketoft said the lessons from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and most recently from the Ebola epidemic, have thrown into stark relief the importance of a functioning and effective health system which is capable of withstanding shocks.

“Universal health coverage is absolutely fundamental to this. It cuts across all of the health-related goals and epitomized the SDGs' strong focus on equity and reaching the poorest, most disadvantaged people everywhere,” he said, recalling that leading economists from 44 countries had declared in September that investment in universal health coverage will bring enormous benefits – in times of crises it mitigates the impact of shocks on communities, while in times of calm, it fosters more cohesive societies and productive economies.

“Let us use today's celebration of Universal Health Coverage Day to tie our efforts together in a more cohesive way and turn it into a movement towards our shared goals. Let governments, civil society, international organizations, researchers and the private sector work together so that we can deliver the resources and the new, innovative, people-centred approaches to enable all people to enjoy equitable access to quality health services without fear of impoverishment,” Mr. Lykketoft concluded.

**COP21: a ‘green’ UN climate change conference, from electric cars to the power of human energy**

14 December - With countries reaching a new agreement at the United Nations climate change conference (COP21), the global meeting has been qualified as a “monumental triumph” by top UN officials. While many continued to hail the outcome document as the walls of COP21 were torn down on Sunday, the UN News Centre looked back on other aspects that contributed “positive energy” to the two-week event.

Highlighting what made COP21 “green” was Fanina Kodre-Alexander from the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), who manages communications on climate change, disasters and conflicts. She said UNEP worked with the organizers – the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Government of France – to ensure sustainability throughout the Paris-Le Bourget site located north-east of the capital.

“We work under our ‘Eat, Think, Save’ campaign in collaboration with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, and we believe that food waste is the third largest emitter after a couple of countries,” Ms. Koder-Alexander noted.

To reduce waste, all the food provided at UNEP events, including those during COP21, is sourced from rescued food, resources that would otherwise have been destroyed. Ms. Kodre-Alexander highlighted that it’s always provided in a “very appetizing and lovely way.”

Another exciting feature at COP21 related to food, which attracted a lot of attention, was the boulangers brought on premise to avoid trucking kilos of fresh baguettes ever day.

They welcomed the UN News Centre into their lab, which is visible to all conference-goers through a thin see-through plastic tarp.

To go with the bread, of course there’s café.

“We’re very happy to see they’re using recyclable cups,” said Ms. Kodre-Alexander. “The method which they’ve employed
is that people are returning them to get a credit. It’s quite successful and you don’t see them left around and dropped in the garbage.”

In addition, welcome packs handed out to all participants included water bottles to limit the number of plastic ones purchased. Water stations to fill these were abundantly found around every corner, similarly to the many recycling bins, clearly labeled to support the separation of paper, plastics and compostable organic waste.

“UNEP has also tried to be as paperless as possible,” added Ms. Kodre-Alexander. “There are certain documents that need to be printed and distributed but we believe in either providing links to our website or USB keys when available.”

On Saturday, the printed final draft of the agreement was handed out to delegates to review before they reconvened hours later for its adoption. This was a rare time paper was seen throughout the venue, as negotiators met in all free spaces including the cafeteria.

Meanwhile, several eco-friendly options were available to get to and from the site. In addition to free public buses, 300 electric cars were provided by Renault-Nissan to anyone seeking a ride. Reservations could be made online just hours in advance, or in person with a little extra wait time. Two hundred of the drivers were professional chauffeurs, while the rest volunteered to help limit COP21’s carbon footprint. According to Renault-Nissan, a total of 16.32 tons of carbon dioxide were diverted during the two weeks thanks to the initiative.

While the cars recharged during the day, so did thousands of cell phones at power stations provided by a group called “Solar Sound Systems.” Unlike a typical plug, participants had to pedal to activate the charging. Similarly, this applied to making one’s own juice and contributing to power a DJ booth located in the Generation Climat hall, a space open to the public and dedicated to the exchange of idea, mainly between younger climate advocates.

Despite all these “green” options, the UN News Centre asked Ms. Kodre-Alexander whether there was anything more she had wished to see at the conference.

“Personally for me it’s always the heating/air conditioning issue,” she answered. “I always find that if you’re overheating the venues and then air conditioning others, you’re consuming a lot of resources that would normally be saved.”

Perhaps this is an additional aspect to consider next year, when a new COP convenes next November in Marrakesh, Morocco.

Ban urges peaceful, credible vote ahead of constitutional referendum in Central African Republic

12 December - On the eve of the referendum on the draft Constitution in the Central African Republic, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called on all national stakeholders to ensure that the referendum is conducted in a peaceful and credible manner.

“The referendum is a significant milestone towards the end of the transition in the Central African Republic which will lay new foundations for a stable future for the country and its people,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.

Mr. Ban also reiterated the commitment of the United Nations to continue to support the efforts of the Transitional Authorities and the electoral process.

Earlier, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein voiced deep concern at mounting sectarian language, warning of possible “dramatic consequences” given the highly volatile pre-election atmosphere.
“I strongly condemn the incitement of violence and provocation of inter-communal tensions by some armed groups and political leaders. This could very easily lead to yet another wave of targeted attacks in the country,” said Mr. Zeid in a statement.