In the headlines:

- 'Emergency relief is never enough,’ says Ban, urging UN to help Nepal build back better
- Amid ‘extremely tense situation’ in Burundi, UN rights chief warns against reprisals in wake of failed coup
- As humanitarian pause holds in Yemen, UN aid airlift arrives with critical supplies
- UN chief applauds resumption of ‘full-fledged’ talks on Cyprus
- Ban hails Mali peace agreement as ‘important step’ towards stability
- In wake of deadly shoe factory fire in Manila, UN urges global action to make workplaces safe
- Libya: UN mission urges end to abduction of civilians, warns of criminal liability for such acts
- UN rights chief urges Southeast Asia States to protect migrants stranded at sea
- On International Day of Families, Ban spotlights need for gender equality, children's rights
- Ban deplores Israel’s advancement of settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territories

‘Emergency relief is never enough,’ says Ban, urging UN to help Nepal build back better

15 May - Over the past three weeks, the lives of eight million Nepalese people has been “changed beyond recognition,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the United Nations General Assembly today, as he called on the international community to rally in support of the country and invest for the long haul so that it can sustain itself as it recovers and rebuilds from a devastating earthquake.

During a special Assembly session that saw the adoption of a resolution on ‘Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction in response to the devastating effects of the earthquake’, Mr. Ban expressed condolences to everyone who lost a family, friend or loved one during the massive 7.8 magnitude quake that struck Nepal on 25 April, killing more than 8,200. Another powerful temblor shook the country this past Tuesday, killing dozens more and dealing another blow to Nepal’s severely crippled infrastructure.

Through their consensus resolution, Member States requested the Secretary-General and the wider UN system to continue to assist Nepal in ensuring effective coordination of the national and international relief, and reconstruction efforts. Under the terms of the text, the 193-member body also emphasized the importance of linking relief with rehabilitation and development from very early on, of building resilience and “building back better.”

“Emergency relief is never enough,” said Mr. Ban as he took to the podium before Member States adopted the resolution.

“People must also be able to sustain their livelihoods. Efforts to stimulate small and medium enterprises will have long-reaching benefits. Nepal has been torn apart, years of development gains destroyed. Basic social services, in particular healthcare and education, have been interrupted. Tourism and communication have all suffered highly,” he added.

The Nepal Earthquake Flash Appeal launched by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
stands at $423 million to support people through immediate lifesaving aid operations. But the appeal is currently only 14 per cent funded, Mr. Ban pointed out.

“Three weeks since the earthquake, humanitarian operations are intensifying and relief goods are entering the country more quickly. Humanitarian agencies are relying on the local communities and are using every means possible to reach communities that are cut off from transformation networks,” he emphasized.

Hundreds of thousands of people were left homeless and countless more without food, water, and healthcare. Some of the hard-hit villages are in the toughest to reach areas. Since the quake hit, more than a million people have been reached with food. Emergency health teams are present across the country.

“Humanitarian aid is making a difference but we need to do more with the monsoon season starting in June more than half a million people must have emergency shelter before the heavy rain starts,” Mr. Ban said.

Making sure aid is delivered is especially critical now as monsoon season approaches. It is also currently planting season and next year’s harvest will be severely affected unless farmers can plant their seeds now. But some areas of Nepal has lost all their water and sanitation facilities.

“I cannot stress enough the importance of getting aid and clean water supplies to everyone in need over the next few weeks,” Mr. Ban said, pointing out that discussions between the Nepalese Government, European Union, development banks and United Nations are already underway.

Echoing that sentiment, acting Vice-President of the General Assembly, Kaha Imnadze, speaking on behalf of General Assembly President Sam Kutesa stressed that access to health care, sanitation and hygiene services are critical priorities that must be addressed.

“As we have learned from similar natural disasters, increases in mortality, morbidity and outbreaks of communicable diseases can be prevented through access to basic health care and clean water,” he added.

“Beyond the needs of urban centres, people displaced from rural villages need to be able to return to their homes before the start of the planting season. Failing to enable people to return to their respective villages to plant crops could have severe consequences for the country’s food security,” Mr. Imnadze emphasized.

In coordinating relief efforts, it is important to bear in mind there is only a “small window of opportunity” to assist affected communities.

“With the monsoon season set to start in June, it is of utmost important that a comprehensive relief effort is launched as quickly and efficiently as possible,” he added.
Amid ‘extremely tense situation’ in Burundi, UN rights chief warns against reprisals in wake of failed coup

15 May - The United Nations human rights chief has voiced concern over the developments in Burundi over the past two days following a reportedly failed coup d’état in the country’s capital and urged all armed forces and non-state actors to refrain from actions that may endanger civilians.

“I am deeply worried by the extremely tense situation in Burundi. We are receiving alarming messages from human rights defenders and journalists fearing for their safety,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein declared in a press release issued this afternoon.

“I urge the Burundian authorities to ensure their protection and to guarantee that there will be no unlawful reprisals following Wednesday’s failed coup.”

The attempted coup d’état in the Burundian capital, Bujumbura, was set in motion on 13 May after President Pierre Nkurunziza left for the Summit of the East African Community with hopes of resolving the country’s long-running political crisis.

Tensions have been running high in Burundi since 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.

Amid reports that Mr. Nkurunziza had regained control of his Government earlier today, Mr. Zeid urged all sides to “refrain from taking violent actions” and to pay “special attention” to the protection of civilians in what he described as a “highly violent context.”

“In light of the calls made by the civil society to restart the demonstrations in Bujumbura, I urge the Burundian authorities to ensure that security forces comply fully with the country’s international human rights obligations and international standards on policing demonstrations,” Mr. Zeid continued.

“Those who incite or engage in acts of mass violence should be aware that they are liable to be prosecuted by competent judicial bodies, as reflected in the recent statement by the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court,” the High Commissioner warned.

Mr. Zeid’s appeal comes on the heels of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s statement yesterday in which he similarly urged all political and security leaders to clearly and openly reject the use of violence, refrain from acts of revenge, and rein in their militants.

Earlier this morning, Mr. Ban spoke with President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya about the situation in Burundi and emphasized the need for leaders in the region to join efforts to help resolve the crisis in the country. The Secretary-General plans to speak to President Nkurunziza and other leaders in the coming days, according to a UN spokesperson.

Against that backdrop, the humanitarian crisis spawned by the political instability and insecurity in Burundi has also prompted widespread concern across the UN system as thousands of Burundian refugees spill over into neighbouring countries.
Mr. Zeid voiced concerns that the political instability and reports of intimidation of civilians could result in an even greater humanitarian crisis amid “a significant increase” of refugees fleeing Burundi and reports of rapidly deteriorating sanitary conditions in some locations where large numbers of refugees have gathered, such as Kagunga, a border village on the shore of Lake Tanganyika in Tanzania.

To that point, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) has noted that over 105,000 people have now fled the country, with 70,187 in neighbouring Tanzania, 26,300 in Rwanda and 9,183 to the province of South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Speaking to a news conference, UNHCR spokesperson Karin de Grujl added that the number of arrivals in Tanzania had risen sharply in recent days, with authorities reporting that over 50,000 Burundians are living rough in Kagunga.

“With the rapidly increasing number of people arriving in Kagunga, the living conditions have become extremely dire. People managed to bring some food and can fish in the lake, but the lack of clean drinking water, latrines and shelter is acute,” Ms. de Grujl told reporters. “The local health services in the village are overwhelmed.”

She added that UNHCR is currently on the ground setting up a reception centre to address the most urgent needs and also fast-tracking the transfer of pregnant women, children, elderly and sick refugees to neighbouring Kigoma.

In addition, seventeen trucks carrying thousands of tents, plastic sheeting, mosquito nets, blankets, kitchen sets, jerry cans, solar lamps and other basic relief items from UNHCR regional warehouses are expected to arrive in Kigoma on 17 May, as UNHCR and its partners gear up for a large-scale refugee emergency. More than 18,000 refugees have been moved to the refugee camp so far.

As humanitarian pause holds in Yemen, UN aid airlift arrives with critical supplies

**15 May** - The first of six airplanes from the United Nations refugee agency bringing urgently needed aid supplies landed safely in Yemen today boosting relief stocks in the war-ravaged country, on the third day of the temporary humanitarian pause, the Organization has confirmed.

“The supplies will help alleviate the tough conditions for tens of thousands of desperate civilians wrenched from their homes as a result of the escalated conflict, as well as the closing down of what were already threadbare basic services,” said Ms. Charlotte Ridung with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Yemen.

“The population of Yemen now has some breathing space and the humanitarian community the possibility to deliver much needed assistance,” she added.

The plane, carrying blankets, kitchen utensils and sleeping mats from stockpiles in Dubai, arrived at Sana’a International Airport at 15:45 local time. A second aircraft is expected to arrive later this afternoon. Four more flights will follow over the next two days, provided local security conditions allow. Together, the six flights will bring in 150 metric tonnes of relief supplies into Sana’a, while more aid is on its way via Djibouti by sea – part of a larger aid effort underway for 250,000 people.

Apart from some localized skirmishes, the humanitarian pause, which officially started in the evening of 12 May, has largely held – opening up roads, markets and supply routes to UNHCR and its partners.

In the last two days, UNHCR and partners have moved and distributed aid for displaced communities in Sana’a, Amran, and Haradh in the north of Yemen, while aid from our Sana’a warehouse has been moved to Aden for distribution to some of the most vulnerable displaced people in the south.

With local partners, UNHCR has also been reaching out to communities, carrying out new assessments to inform our aid
distribution and identify urgent protection needs.

An estimated 450,000 Yemenis have been uprooted from their homes in the recent conflict, joining another 330,000 people, who were previously displaced.

Some 250,000 mainly Somali refugees in Yemen have also been affected by hostilities. Another 29,000 people of mixed nationalities have fled Yemen to neighbouring countries.

**UN chief applauds resumption of ‘full-fledged’ talks on Cyprus**

15 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the resumption of full-fledged negotiations between Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot Leader Mustafa Akinci, the United Nations spokesperson has confirmed.

“With the momentum continuing to build for a solution to the long-standing division of the island, the Secretary-General salutes the commitment of the leaders to move forward without delay, in a constructive and dedicated manner,” the UN spokesperson declared in a statement issued early this morning.

“The Secretary-General calls on the leaders to seize this opportunity to achieve tangible progress towards a comprehensive settlement that would clearly benefit both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots.”

The negotiations – scheduled to resume today – will be held under the facilitation of the UN Special Adviser, Espen Barth Eide, who recently said that he strongly felt 2015 would be a decisive year and that he hoped it would be a decisive one in the right direction.

In the statement, the spokesperson added that Mr. Ban reiterated his commitment to supporting the leaders in their efforts to achieve “a mutually agreed comprehensive settlement” based on the Joint Declaration of 11 February 2014 and in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

**Ban hails Mali peace agreement as ‘important step’ towards stability**

15 May - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the signature of a peace agreement between the Government of Mali and members of the Plateforme coalition of armed groups in a key step towards bringing stability and security back to the beleaguered country.

In a statement issued by the UN spokesperson’s office today, Mr. Ban applauded the signing of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Malian capital, Bamako, and congratulated the parties and the Algeria-led Mediation Team for their efforts in producing a “balanced text.”

“The Secretary-General notes that today’s signature by some of the parties is an important step on the path towards sustainable peace,” the statement continued. “He conveys his sincere hope that other parties to the Algiers political process will adhere to the Agreement as soon as possible.”

Moreover, it added that Mr. Ban reminded all parties that the 23 May 2014 ceasefire remains valid and that he urges them “to honour their commitments in this regard.”

Despite positive developments on the ground, the situation in Mali has long remained a challenge. The country’s Government has been seeking to restore stability and rebuild following a series of setbacks since early 2012, including a
military coup d'état, renewed fighting between Government forces and Tuareg rebels, and the seizure of its northern territory by radical Islamists.

Throughout much of this time, Mali’s north has remained restive and, in recent months, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA) and its “blue helmets” have come under repeated violent attack.

In addition, the country has been consumed by a series of humanitarian crises. Jens Laerke, from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), recently noted that at the peak of the crisis, more than 500,000 people had left the north of Mali to seek refuge in the south or in neighbouring countries. Although nearly 400,000 had already returned, they continued to face challenges in restarting their lives as communities had become more vulnerable, livelihoods had deteriorated, and social services were working only partially, especially in rural areas.

At the same time, Mali continued to face a high level of food insecurity and malnutrition – a problem affecting countries throughout Africa's Sahel region. According to UN estimates, nearly 2.6 million people in Mali, or 15 per cent of the total population, will suffer from food insecurity this year while more than one in 10 children would be affected by acute malnutrition.

According to the UN spokesperson, Mr. Ban “firmly believes” that the Agreement is “a strong basis on which to build a just and lasting peace in Mali” and noted that the Secretary-General calls on all parties “to continue dialogue in view of securing the signature of all parties as soon as possible.”

**In wake of deadly shoe factory fire in Manila, UN urges global action to make workplaces safe**

15 May - The International Labour Organization (ILO), in a statement issued in the wake of this week's deadly shoe factory fire in the Philippine capital, noted “often such accidents are preventable” and offered its assistance to improve safety and health conditions in the workplace.

“I was greatly saddened by the news of the deaths of dozens of workers in the shoe factory fire in Manila,” ILO Director-General Guy Ryder said. “On behalf of the International Labour Organization (ILO), I extend my condolences to the bereaved families and share in their sorrow.”

“Once again, we find ourselves mourning workers whose lives have been cut short as a result of workplace accidents,” Mr. Ryder said. “Often such accidents are preventable.”

The reported death toll in a fire on Wednesday that destroyed a shoe factory in the Philippine capital has risen to 72, according to news reports.

In the statement issued the following day, Mr. Ryder noted that “everyone has the right to work in a safe and healthy environment, regardless of the industry they are in or the type of work that they do.”

“We can make workplaces safe by improving working conditions in factories, including carrying out regular inspections to ensure that factories comply with structural, fire and electrical safety; and by ensuring workers’ rights, especially freedom of association and collective bargaining,” the statement said.

It went on to say: “As always, the ILO stands ready to assist, working with employers, workers and their organizations and all stakeholders to improve safety and health conditions in the workplace.”

ILO also noted that despite the Philippines' rapid economic growth, working poverty has only declined by one per cent in five years.

Issuing a separate statement, the Geneva-based UN Working Group on business and human rights noted that the Philippines
fire echoed another recent tragedy at a garment factory in the region, and underscored that “the lessons of the Rana Plaza disaster have still not been learned.”

“The tragic death of factory workers, mainly women, is a stark reminder of the urgent need for action to protect workers in the garment industry, despite of the Bangladesh Accord for Fire and Building Safety, created two years ago, on the same date as the Manila shoe factory fire,” said Michael Addo, who currently heads the expert group.

The collapse of the Rana Plaza building with more than 3,000 garment workers inside in 2013 was a wake-up call for action by governments, trade unions and industry to address systemic human rights issues in the garment sector. “This week's factory fire in Manila must strengthen our resolve to call for action to prevent such accidents from taking place,” Mr. Addo noted.

The Bangladesh Accord is a legally binding agreement which has been signed by over 150 corporations from 20 countries, global and local trade unions, non-governmental organizations and workers' rights groups.

The Rana Plaza disaster also led to progress, supported by the ILO, on labour law reform, labour inspection, workplace safety and compensation for injuries to take steps to strengthen inspections of working conditions in factories. Government efforts have been undertaken in collaboration with the Accord and with another initiative, the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, led by 26 mainly North American companies.

“The Working Group commends such collaborative actions to find practical solutions to the address health and safety risks. Yet, it recalls that there are many cases of human rights abuses by business enterprises in which victims are unable to access justice and where impunity prevails,” the expert said.

“Accidents are still happening, financing of action plans aimed at improving fire and building safety remains contentious, trade unions continue to face obstacles in registering and operating in many countries, and victims of Rana Plaza and other workplace accidents face long delays in receiving compensation.” Mr. Addo underlined.

“We urge States and the business community to be more pro-active to ensure safe working conditions for workers in the garment and textile industry, to avoid a continuous repetition of these preventable tragedies,” he stressed.

“The Working Group calls all States and businesses to take all necessary measures at the national, regional and international level to prevent future business-related harm, protect rights on freedom of association and collective bargaining, and provide for effective remedy for victims,” Mr. Addo said.

The group of human rights experts also expressed their profound sadness and condolences to the families of the factory workers who lost their lives in the Manila shoe factory this week.

**Libya: UN mission urges end to abduction of civilians, warns of criminal liability for such acts**

15 May - Armed groups across Libya are responsible for abductions of civilians including minors on account of their actual or perceived origin, opinion, family and political affiliation, the United Nations mission in the country said today.

“Hostage-taking, torture and murder are war crimes,” said the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) in a briefing note released today. “Those responsible for committing, ordering or failing to prevent such crimes when in a position to do so are criminally liable, including in front of the International Criminal Court.”

The note said that those abducted are usually at risk of torture and other ill-treatment, and are frequently denied any contact with their families. Some have died in custody, possibly summarily executed or tortured to death.
“Abductions of civilians are perpetrated against the backdrop of ongoing fighting, deepening political crisis, terrorist attacks, the spread of the so-called Islamic State and other extremist groups, lawlessness and the breakdown of the criminal justice system, leaving victims and families with few avenues for redress,” the note said.

The Mission underlined the commitment made by parties to the Libyan political dialogue to address the issue of those illegally detained and the mission, noting that a number of prisoner exchanges have taken place in recent days and months and calling on all those with effective control on the ground to refrain from abducting civilians, to immediately release all those held and to ensure the well-being of anyone deprived of their liberty.

UN rights chief urges Southeast Asia States to protect migrants stranded at sea

15 May - The United Nations human rights chief today urged governments in Southeast Asia to take swift action to protect the lives of migrants stranded in precarious maritime conditions and warned against the policy of pushing boats back out to sea.

“I am appalled at reports that Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia have been pushing boats full of vulnerable migrants back out to sea, which will inevitably lead to many avoidable deaths,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein in a statement released today. “The focus should be on saving lives, not further endangering them.”

While Mr. Zeid praised Indonesia for disembarking 582 migrants on 10 May, and Malaysia for disembarking 1,018 the following day, he said the “incomprehensible and inhumane” policy of “pushbacks” was endangering lives. He also spoke against countries’ plans to criminalize vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers who have crossed borders irregularly.

“Governments in South-East Asia need to respond to this crisis from the premise that migrants, regardless of their legal status, how they arrive at borders, or where they come from, are people with rights that must be upheld,” he said. “Criminalizing such vulnerable people, including children, and placing them in detention is not the solution.”

Around 6,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants are believed to remain stranded at sea in precarious conditions in the region and the High Commissioner said the individual circumstances of all migrants and asylum seekers at international borders should be assessed, and appropriate protection provided according to international human rights and refugee law, including ensuring that the principle of non-refoulement is upheld.

He called for further action against traffickers and abusive smugglers and welcomed the announcement that Thailand would host a regional meeting on irregular migration in the Indian Ocean on 29 May. In discussions on comprehensive responses, the regional meeting would seek to address root causes, one of which, he said, was the importance of addressing the serious human rights situation in Rakhine state, in Myanmar.

“Until the Myanmar Government addresses the institutional discrimination against the Rohingya population, including equal access to citizenship, this precarious migration will continue,” he said. “Whether fleeing persecution, discrimination, poverty or other human rights violations, or moving in search of decent work and a life with dignity, all migrants who take to the seas in such perilous circumstances are in need of protection.”

A coherent, human rights-based regional response was urgently needed and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) could play a leadership role in that regard.

“I urge the participating governments to ensure that their responses are based on international human rights and refugee law,” Mr. Zeid said. “This is a complex and multi-dimensional issue requiring a holistic response, which will include stepped-up search and rescue efforts, the timely and safe disembarkation of migrants in distress, and access to appropriate human rights protection safeguards. Dangerous interception practices, including pushing back boats that are trying to land, must be scrupulously avoided.”
A statement released by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) pointed out the obligations held by Southeast Asian countries under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which all those States had ratified.

“Any action that may impact on children must be guided by the best interests of those children, no matter who they are and where they come from,” the statement said. “The [Convention] requires governments to ensure all children are cared for in a safe place, with access to education, health, social and legal services, irrespective of their refugee or migrant status.”

Article 22 of that Convention demands that Governments ensure protection and humanitarian assistance for children seeking refugee status and UNICEF’s statement stressed the increased vulnerabilities faced by child migrants.

“Children should not be criminalised or subject to punitive measures solely because of their migration status, nor should they be detained for purposes of migration control,” said the statement. “All actions in regard to child migrants must be guided by the best interests of every one of these children, every step of the way.”

Last year, the number of people leaving Myanmar and Bangladesh by boat is estimated to have climbed to around 53,000. Some 920 migrants are known to have perished in the Bay of Bengal between September 2014 and March this year. They have been predominantly Rohingya fleeing persecution from Rakhine State in Myanmar, with increasing numbers of impoverished Bangladeshi migrants taking to the seas over the last year.

**On International Day of Families, Ban spotlights need for gender equality, children's rights**

15 May - It is time to change social norms that support male control over women and reinforce discrimination against vulnerable family members, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today on International Day of Families.

The UN chief added that equitable social and economic development depends on fair legal frameworks that support the rights of women and children.

“Discriminatory laws and practices that do not give equal rights to all, and that suppress women's and children's rights, have no place in contemporary families, communities, societies and nations,” Mr. Ban said in a statement.

Discrimination and neglect often leads to violence, threatening women's and children's health and limiting their chances to complete education and fulfil their potential. This cycle tends to continue into the next generation, as children experiencing violence are more likely to resort to violence in their adult lives, he added.

“In too many countries, discrimination against women and disregard for children's rights remain built into family laws and Government policies, and prevailing social norms often condone and justify many discriminatory practices,” Mr. Ban said.

Marked worldwide on 15 May, the theme of this year's International Day of Families – “Men in Charge?” – highlights the importance of gender equality and children's rights in contemporary families as more and more women are recognized as equal partners and decision-makers.

“On this Day, let us resolve to change legal and social norms that support male control over women, reinforce discrimination and prevent the elimination of violence against vulnerable family members,” Mr. Ban said.

“As we shape a new sustainable development agenda and strive for a world of dignity for all, let us stand united for women's and children's rights in families and societies at large,” he emphasized.

The Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993, reflecting the importance the international community attaches to families.
The Day has also inspired a series of awareness-raising events, including national family days. In many countries, the occasion is an opportunity to highlight different areas of interest and importance to families. Activities include workshops and conferences, radio and television programmes, newspaper articles and cultural programmes highlighting relevant themes.

**Ban deplores Israel’s advancement of settlement activities in occupied Palestinian territories**

15 May - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has strongly deplored the advancement of settlement activities on three occasions over the past three consecutive weeks by the Israeli authorities in the occupied West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, a spokesman for the UN said today.

“He reiterates that settlements are illegal under international law and urges the Government of Israel to halt and reverse such decisions in the interest of peace and a just final status agreement,” said a statement released from Mr. Ban’s spokesman.

The Secretary-General also reiterated that the international community will not recognize unilateral actions on the ground and that the status of Jerusalem can only be resolved through negotiations.