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General Assembly elects former Danish Foreign Minister as President of 70th session

15 June - The United Nations General Assembly has elected by acclamation Mogens Lykketoft of Denmark as President of its upcoming 70th session.

Addressing delegates immediately after his election today at UN Headquarters in New York, Mr. Lykkeftof, who has served both as Denmark’s Foreign and Finance Ministers, declared that his Presidency would be marked by a “commitment to action” towards building “a more fair and stable world” in line with the objectives set out by the UN Millennium Development Goals.

“What is now in front of Member States is the final stretch towards adopting a universal, people-centred, transformative development agenda that addresses the struggle of our lifetime,” he affirmed. “When implemented, it will enable us to eradicate poverty while keeping climate change at bay, building resilience, and creating inclusive and sustainable economic growth.”

Mr. Lykketoft, who will celebrate his 70th birthday this year just as the UN marks its 70th anniversary, took care to point out the three priorities that, he said, would define his mandate, including a commitment to action, a surge in UN efforts to cement international peace and security, and a clear effort to support further progress for human rights.

“My goal is to seek pragmatic and action-oriented outcomes that can provide guidance on how to proceed with timely and effective implementation for all actors – the UN system, Member States, civil society, and private sector,” he continued.
adding that his intention was to conduct the Presidency in “a transparent, inclusive and open manner.”

The President-elect further noted that he would take into consideration many Member States’ continuing interest in Security Council reform, particularly ahead of the selection process for the next Secretary-General.

Nonetheless, he stated, the focus must remain on rebooting the UN’s unique form of multilateralism which, in turn, fosters trust and hope in global solutions.

“Today’s decision-makers must acknowledge that 2015 is the time to make a new commitment to action for the sake of generations to come,” Mr. Lykketoft stated. “We will have to find ways to achieve sustainable growth, where the distance between rich and poor nations and peoples does not become larger but smaller. Where we not only create development and eradicate extreme poverty but also deliver a more equitable access to and distribution of global goods.”

Congratulating Mr. Lykketoft on his new role, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon celebrated the former Danish politician for his “outstanding commitment” to development and his “great understanding of the major challenges of our times.”

Such aptitude, he noted, will prove to be critical as the UN and international community are propelled towards a series of target dates for the Millennium Development Goals, sustainable development initiatives and for the fight against climate change.

“This election is an annual event on the United Nations calendar – but this year offers an extraordinary opportunity to shape history,” Mr. Ban continued. “We could not have a better leader in His Excellency Mr. Lykketoft.”

The Secretary-General added that he counted on the new General Assembly President to celebrate the upcoming UN milestones – including the Organization’s 70th anniversary – with “an even stronger commitment” to multilateralism, international cooperation and global solidarity.

“Together,” he concluded, “we can act so the United Nations lives up to its historic ambitions for this year and helps secure the long-term future of our world.”

In his remarks, Sam Kutesa, current General Assembly President, said the world body’s 70th anniversary session will be historic, as member States are expected to adopt an ambitious and transformative post-2015 development agenda, as well as work towards a universal climate change agreement in December, under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

“With these important milestones approaching, we still have important preparatory work during this 69th session,” he said, noting in particular, the negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda and the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held next month in Addis Ababa, have reached a critical stage. “We have to redouble our efforts in order to ensure successful outcomes,” he said.

Mr. Lykketoft will kick-off his Presidency in September at the commencement of the 70th General Assembly session.

Made up of all the 193 Member States of the United Nations, the General Assembly provides a forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the UN Charter. It meets in regular session intensively from September to December each year, and thereafter as required.
South Sudanese refugee influx in Sudan ‘an emergency within an emergency’ – UN

15 June - The United Nations refugee agency reported today that some 14,000 South Sudanese – mainly women and children – have fled into Sudan over the weekend, describing the situation as “an emergency within an emergency.”

“The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has registered close to 160,000 refugees in Sudan since fighting broke out in South Sudan in December 2013,” stated UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric during the daily briefing to the press at UN Headquarters in New York.

A key priority for the humanitarian community, he added, is to prepare for the upcoming rainy season, which is due to start in the coming weeks and will further complicate operations.

“Rapid scaling up of water, sanitation and hygiene interventions is critical as rains will also heighten the risk of water-borne diseases such as dysentery and cholera.”

So far only 10 per cent of the $152 million requested to assist South Sudanese refugees in Sudan has been contributed.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in their country has deteriorated significantly over the past two months with the intensification of military operations in Upper Nile and Unity states, reminded the Spokesperson.

It is estimated that by July some 4.6 million people could be severely food insecure - the highest number since the beginning of the crisis.

The security situation in South Sudan has deteriorated steadily over the past year since political in-fighting between President Salva Kiir and his former Vice-President, Riek Machar, and their respective factions erupted in December 2013. The hostilities subsequently turned into a full-fledged conflict that has caused more than 110,000 civilians to seek safety on bases belonging to the UN Mission in country (UNMISS).

In Geneva, Ban says international community has ‘obligation to act’ for Yemen peace

15 June - The international community has not a moment to lose if it is to help end the fighting in Yemen and broker a lasting peace for the country, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced today as he urged stakeholders to “make the most of the momentum of opportunity.”

Briefing the press at the UN Office in Geneva at the opening of consultations on the situation in the Gulf state, the Secretary-General explained that as total casualty figures surpassed 2,600, the UN and Member States retained “a special obligation to act.”

“Today, Yemen’s very existence hangs in the balance. While parties bicker, Yemen burns,” Mr. Ban told reporters.

“The parties have a responsibility to end the fighting and begin a real process of peace and reconciliation.”
The ongoing hostilities in Yemen have only deepened its already existential humanitarian crisis, plunging the country’s civilians even further into despair. Already the poorest nation in the Gulf region prior to the fighting, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) recently stressed that more than 15 million Yemenis do not have access to basic healthcare, with 53 health facilities closed and malnutrition increasing. Eighty per cent of the country’s population is currently in need of critical humanitarian aid.

In addition, the country’s extensive archaeological and historic heritage has been increasingly under threat following a surge in aerial bombing raids in the Old City of Sana’a, Yemen’s capital.

The Secretary-General warned that the ongoing fighting was also feeding into the growth of “ruthless” terrorist groups and risked transforming Yemen into a ticking “time bomb.”

“We don’t have a moment to lose” declared Mr. Ban, adding: “The region simply cannot sustain another open wound like Syria and Libya. We must find a way to end the suffering and begin the long road to peace.”

To that point, Mr. Ban added, there was reason for hope, as he delineated his call for action involving a renewed humanitarian pause to commence in time for the holy month of Ramadan; the agreement for local ceasefires as a pathway towards a lasting nationwide ceasefire; and a call for all Yemeni stakeholders to resume “a peaceful and orderly political transition.”

“Once again, Yemen faces a hard road,” the Secretary-General concluded. “But I hope that this week will mark the beginning of the end of fighting – and the start of a new and better future the people of Yemen so desperately deserve.”

**Welcoming progress on human rights, UN official urges action to bolster protections and end abuses**

15 June - While 70 years of work by the United Nations has helped build a formidable system of rights protections, the nagging persistence of “everything else” – wars and ongoing deprivation – is deeply worrying, the top UN human rights official declared today, urging renewed action to promote economic and social rights for all and tackle pervasive discrimination and repression.

“Simply put, too many of us live among brutal conflicts, and are threatened by greed, ambition and contempt for human life,” Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stressed in his opening remarks to the 29th session of the Geneva-based Human Rights Council.

Decrying “unmistakeable signs of growing abandonment, of a headlong retreat, by too many States,” Mr. Zeid said too many people are still being denied their economic and social rights, and the result is suffering on a colossal scale. “Discrimination so severe and pervasive still, that it deprives too many people of the means of existence. Repression that stifles the human voice, and breaks the spirit, is also still too evident.”

Outlining the need to always be sensitive and act sensitively wherever rights have been violated, M. Al Hussein reminded that, in recent weeks, “there has been much criticism of the UN made by a number of observers, and specifically of my Office and its leadership, in respect of how we handled allegations of appalling child abuse in the Central African Republic (CAR) last year.”

The conduct which drew the criticisms deserves judgement, he added, expressing support for the Secretary-General’s decision to establish an external review. “I will accept the result, and abide by its findings, of course, whether they relate to my Office or my own conduct in this matter,” he stated.

On June 3rd, the Secretary-General had announced his intention to establish an independent panel to investigate the United Nations’ handling of sexual abuse allegations involving foreign troops in the CAR.
Reminding to Member States that they must show leadership too, the UN High Commissioner rejected the idea that, “in this chamber,” he should not “name and shame,” asserting that “the greatest factory of shame is the blanket denial of human rights.”

Saying that the conflict in Syria is the “most mind-numbing humanitarian crisis of our era”, and “a defining test of what we so often term the international community,” Mr. Zeid equally condemned “more than four years of a sustained campaign of terror directed by the Government against its own people, and the rise of non-State actors capable of the most appalling horror.”

“It has forced the largest movement of people since the Second World War, with well over 7 million people displaced within the country and 4 million fleeing it,” he underscored, expressing his growing concern towards the situation of migrants, many coming from Syria.

Hoping that the consultations between the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, with Syrian, regional and international actors, will “pave the way for peace,” he stressed that any agreement should be focused on the human rights of all the Syrian people, and the need to repair the fissures between ethnic and religious communities.

In addition to the situation in neighbouring Iraq, where the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continues to perpetrate the most “despicable abuses,” Zeid talked about Libya, where armed groups continue to engage in violent clashes using heavy weaponry, and indiscriminate shelling of residential neighbourhoods.

In his wide-ranging address, the High Commissioner also noted the human rights situations in a number of countries, including, among others, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, Egypt, Azerbaijan, Burundi, Russia, South Sudan, and Venezuela, as well as the persecution of the Rohingya community in Myanmar and the impact of Boko Haram activities in Northeast Nigeria and neighbouring countries bordering Lake Chad. He also expressed concern about the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Considering that the current context recalls the world’s situation at the turn of the 20th century, the UN rights Chief said 2015 is a year of “vast opportunity for development,” with the pivotal Financing for Development Conference to be held in July in Addis Ababa and a summit on the post-2015 development agenda in September in New York.

“The integration of human rights in that agenda can become a turning point. Sustainable development is about freedom from fear and freedom from want for all,” he concluded.

**On World Day, UN chief shines spotlight on once-taboo topic of elder abuse**

15 June - The distressing crime of elder abuse often occurs in quiet, private settings, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, as he reminded people around the world of the importance of making “a vocal, public response” to support the rights of older persons to a life free of violence and abuse.

“It is a disturbing and tragic fact in our world that members of the older generations are too often neglected and abused,” the UN chief said in a message. “This painful reality generally goes ignored by mainstream society.”

“At the same time,” Mr. Ban said, “the ageing of the world's population has added urgency to promoting and defending the rights of older persons, who are expected to make up more than 20 per cent of the global population by 2050.”

In terms of numbers, that translates into the population of people aged 60 years and older more than doubling from 542 million in 1995 to about 1.2 billion in 2025, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Resolved to shed light on this injustice, the UN General Assembly designated 15 June as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. The annual commemoration has helped to generate an emerging global discussion of a once-taboo issue as people...
come together to support the rights of older persons to a life free of violence and abuse.

Events marking the world day are scheduled around the world, including a commemoration in New York entitled Elder abuse vs. violence against older persons: what are the differences and what are the solutions?, and another in Geneva, Switzerland titled: Falling between the Cracks: Abuse and violence against Older Women Marking World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

Mr. Ban said that for many, elder abuse “conjures an image of a heartless caregiver who is not well-known to the victim. While this deplorable problem does persist, more often it is family members who perpetrate the violations, which include neglect as well as psychological, financial and physical abuse.”

“Research shows that age, gender and dependency raise the risks of abuses, with women suffering the heaviest toll,” he added.

“The distressing crime of elder abuse often occurs in quiet, private settings, making a vocal, public response that much more important,” the Secretary-General concluded. “Let us strengthen our resolve to end this problem as part of our broader efforts to create a life of dignity for all.”

**UN chief condemns deadly Boko Haram attack in Chad**

**15 June** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has strongly condemned a series of deadly bombings in the Chadian capital of N’Djamena which reportedly killed more than 25 people and injured dozens of others, according to a spokesperson for the United Nations.

In a statement issued earlier today, the UN spokesperson said the Secretary-General extends his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims as well as to the Government and people of Chad and wished a “speedy recovery” to those injured.

Initial media reports suggest that Boko Haram is responsible for the suicide attacks which targeted two police buildings in N’Djamena. If confirmed, it would be the group’s latest attack in the region.

In addition to its ongoing terror campaign, the Boko Haram threat in northern Nigeria has provoked a growing refugee crisis and caused widespread displacement with an estimated 200,000 people already seeking safety in neighbouring Niger, Cameroon and Chad amid ongoing regional efforts to counter the extremist group’s reach.

On that note, Mr. Ban commended Chad for its “courageous role” in the fight against Boko Haram as part of a larger Multinational Joint Task Force and stressed “the importance of enhanced collaboration” among countries in West and Central Africa to more effectively combat the threat of Boko Haram.

“The Secretary-General reiterates that States must ensure that all measures taken to address the terrorist threat of Boko Haram comply with all their obligations under international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law,” the statement added.
UN nuclear chief encourages ‘cradle-to-grave’ plans for managing spent fuel and radioactive waste

15 June - Projecting that the use of nuclear power will continue to grow in the coming decades, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) today urged countries with nuclear energy programmes to share their spent fuel and radioactive waste management know-how with less-experienced countries.

“The volume of spent fuel will also continue to grow and it is essential that it is managed safely,” IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano told participants at the International Conference on Management of Spent Fuel from Nuclear Power Reactors, which is under way through 19 June at IAEA headquarters in Vienna, Austria.

The conference is aimed to highlight the importance of an integrated long-term approach to the management of spent fuel from power reactors and is held every three to five years with participants from the nuclear community, including policymakers and representatives of governmental organizations, regulatory bodies, industry, and spent fuel and waste management organizations.

Mr. Amano noted “good progress” has been made in the management of high-level radioactive waste and spent fuel, “especially in Finland, Sweden and France.”

“It will still be some years before the first deep geological repositories for nuclear spent fuel become operational,” he said. “But the progress being made in this area deserves to be better known.”

Saying that the IAEA provides extensive support to countries which are considering, or embarking upon, nuclear power programmes, Mr. Amano noted that in his meetings with leaders from these newcomer countries, he emphasizes “the vital importance” of having “cradle-to-grave” plans in place for both spent fuel and radioactive waste.

“I strongly encourage countries with existing nuclear power programmes, and experience of the back end of the fuel cycle, to share their experience with newcomer countries to ensure that best practice is implemented everywhere,” he said.

Looking ahead, he said that “last September, we devoted our annual Scientific Forum to the subject of Radioactive Waste Management. We are organizing an international conference on the same subject in 2016.”

Supporting the safe management of spent fuel, and of radioactive waste, is a key IAEA activity.

New UN guidebook seeks to prevent child labour practices in agriculture

15 June - A new handbook issued by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) will seek to establish guidelines intended to prevent the use of child labour across the world's agricultural communities in an effort to tackle a problem that affects some one hundred million children globally, the United Nations agency announced today.

The FAO's Handbook for Monitoring and Evaluation of Child Labour in Agriculture will seek to fill the gaps in many agricultural development programmes which fail to monitor or evaluate the impact they have on child labour, especially in those communities where increased labour demands are met through child workers.

“In recent years, we have seen an increase in awareness of child labour and its role in producing export crops such as cocoa, coffee and cotton,” said Rob Vos, Director of FAO's
Social Protection Division, in a press release.

“As a result, we see much more effective action to prevent child labour in these value chains. However, child labour on family farms not connected to international commodity markets has remained largely untouched. The new guide tries to fill this void.”

The 100-page Handbook – developed in partnership with the Berlin-based Humboldt University – provides an easily accessible toolkit of research and data collection methods for assessing child labour in agriculture and the impacts that various types of development programmes can have.

In addition, it encourages the identification and use of good practices to prevent child labour such as the promotion of labour-saving technologies while also offering practical advice on how to collect information to track the impact of child labour on school performance and health.

The FAO’s release of the guide comes just days after the observance of the annual World Day Against Child Labour which saw the UN family raise a call for the international community to invest in quality education as a key step in the fight against child employment.

Syria: UN special envoy arrives in Damascus for talks with Government officials

15 June - The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura has begun a visit to the capital, Damascus, following an invitation by the Government to visit the country, according to a spokesman for the Organization.

“Mr. de Mistura looks forward to meeting with senior Syrian officials with the aim of giving them the opportunity to express their own views on the Geneva Consultations, which started in early May and will continue into July,” UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told the daily briefing at Headquarters in New York.

In this regard, he continued, Mr. de Mistura reiterated his intention of submitting a report to the Secretary-General regarding the operationalization of the Geneva Communiqué in all its aspects.

“During his visit, Mr. de Mistura intends to raise with the Syrian Government the issue of protection of civilians, underlining once again the unacceptable use of barrel bombs and the incontestable duty of any government, in all circumstances, to protect its civilians, under international humanitarian law,” explained Mr. Dujarric.

He said that the Special Envoy also plans to discuss the current humanitarian situation in Syria and ways to increase access to besieged and conflict-affected communities. In his discussions, Mr. de Mistura plans to convey once again to Syrian officials his deep conviction that no solution to the Syrian conflict can be imposed by force and that an inclusive and Syrian-led and owned political settlement is urgently needed.

During Syria’s tragic five-year arc of conflict, 220,000 people have been killed, more than one million have been injured, 7.6 million have been displaced and four million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, according to UN estimates. In recent weeks, well over 100,000 people have been displaced in a new wave of fighting in Idlib while some 14 million people are now displaced due to the interlinked crises in Syria and Iraq.
Libya: UN official calls for ‘immediate’ release of abducted Tunisian diplomatic staff

14 June - The top United Nations official in Libya has strongly condemned an attack on the Tunisian consulate in the Libyan capital of Tripoli which resulted in the capture of ten consulate staff members.

In a press release issued earlier today, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Bernardino Leon, called for “the immediate and unconditional release” of the abducted staff and recalled that the principle of inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises must be respected.

The storming of the Tunisian consulate – which occurred on 12 June, according to media reports – was conducted by a group of unidentified assailants.

“This unacceptable act is a further reminder of the chaos engulfing Libya and the need for Libyans to end the ongoing conflict and to move quickly towards reaching a political agreement that would restore security and stability to their country,” the press release continued.

It added that that Mr. Leon called on all Libyan actors with influence on the ground to do their utmost to ensure the safe release of the Tunisian staff and the protection of diplomatic missions in Libya.

The UNSMIL head's appeal comes just days after Libyan political talks were held in Berlin, Germany between senior officials from a number of States, including the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leon has been actively involved in helping Libyan stakeholders reach a political solution to the country’s crisis and recently warned that the “time has come to make an agreement.”

Increase in voluntary blood donors can save millions of lives, UN health agency says on World Day

14 June - On World Blood Donor Day, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) is calling for increased regular blood donations from voluntary, unpaid donors in order to save millions of lives globally each year.

“The best way to guarantee a safe and adequate supply of blood and blood products for transfusion is to have a good supply of regular donations by voluntary unpaid blood donors,” said WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan in the agency's press release on the Day, which is marked every year on 14, June.

“We encourage all Member States to obtain their blood supplies from such donors.”

The theme of this year's campaign is Thank You for Saving My Life, with the slogan, 'Give freely, give often. Blood donation matters.' The host country for World Blood Donor Day is China, which will host a global event today at the Shanghai Blood Centre.

Transfusion of blood and blood products helps patients suffering from life-threatening conditions to live longer and maintain a higher quality of life, and it supports complex medical and surgical procedures. It has an essential, life-saving role in maternal and child care and during man-made and natural disasters, such as the recent earthquakes in Nepal.
Severe bleeding during pregnancy, delivery or after childbirth is the single biggest cause of maternal death. Of the 289,000 women who died in childbirth in 2013 due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth, 27 per cent were due to severe bleeding.

“Blood collection from voluntary, unpaid donors, whose blood is screened for infections, is the cornerstone of a safe and sufficient blood supply in all countries,” says Dr. Hernan Montenegro, who works at the Department of Service Delivery and Safety at WHO. “More voluntary blood donors are needed to meet the increasing needs and to improve access to this life-saving therapy.”

The percentage of blood donations from voluntary unpaid donors has been increasing over the last decade and 73 of the world’s countries now collect over 90 per cent of their blood supply from such donors. However, more progress is needed, with 72 countries still collecting more than half of their blood supply from paid donors or replacement donors, which affects safety and adequate supply of blood and blood products. Replacement donors are often family members or friends who replenish blood used from a blood bank by a particular patient.

“Safe blood transfusion is one of the key life-saving interventions that should be available for patients in need,” says Dr. Edward Kelley, Director of Service Delivery and Safety at WHO. “Yet, equitable access to safe blood still remains a major challenge in many countries. Providing safe and adequate supplies of blood and blood products should be an essential part of every country’s national health care policy and infrastructure.”

WHO provides policy guidance and technical assistance to support countries in developing national blood systems based on voluntary unpaid blood donations, and implementing quality systems to ensure that safe and quality blood and blood products are available and used appropriately for all people who need them.

UN labour agency closes conference amid appeals for a sustainable ‘future of work’

13 June - The transformation of the global workforce must happen “here and now,” the head of the United Nations labour agency said today as he urged Member States to move ahead and implement changes critical for a sustainable, inclusive and green future of work.

Closing a two-week conference held at the Geneva-based headquarters of the International Labour Organization (ILO), agency Director-General Guy Ryder reminded delegates that they would now need to focus their efforts on four major areas – work and society, decent jobs, the organization of work, and production and the governance of work – in order to bring to fruition the so-called Future of Work Initiative.

“This Initiative will not be implemented in a vacuum. Critically important international processes will be underway – not least the post-2015 development agenda and follow-up to the Paris Climate Change Conference,” Mr. Ryder declared.

“And the changes transforming the world of work will not be put on hold while we work out what to do about them. And so our efforts must take due regard of all of these factors and weave them into the Initiative itself.”

According to the ILO, this year’s conference saw nearly 4,500 delegates from 169 ILO Member States engage in “intensive debate” as they appointed a high-level commission on the future of work to prepare a report for the agency’s centenary conference to be held in 2019. This exercise is expected to define how the ILO will realize its mandate on social justice as it enters its next century.

At the same time, delegates narrowed in on four critical labour issues, namely the adoption of an historic new labour standard aiming to regularize informal workers and lift them into the formal economy; the reaffirmation of their commitment to ensuring the application in law and practice of freedom of association for all workers and employers in the rural economy; the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurship development; and the advancement of labour protection.
“Turning to the question of the next concrete steps, I think we must be mindful of those who said that we cannot wait until 2019 to act because change is here and now,” Mr. Ryder continued.

“It is precisely for that reason that implementation of our Initiative must start as soon as this conference ends.”

**At Conference, UN agriculture agency chief highlights need to 'do more and better with less'**

13 June - The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) closed its week-long governing Conference today with a billion-dollar budgetary boost and a call to renew its efforts towards geographical decentralization – a step that will bring the United Nations agency in closer contact with those populations it is mandated to support.

“If FAO's main mission is to end hunger and malnutrition, then FAO needs to offer holistic support, needs to support sustainable production and management of natural resources, needs to be able to offer support in social protection to reduce rural poverty, needs to improve access to markets by family farmers and needs to help build resilience in rural populations,” declared FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva in his closing remarks.

Mr. Graziano da Silva’s words came as he greeted the Conference's decision to approve a regular budget of just over $1 billion for the delivery of FAO's programme of work over the 2016-2017 period in which the UN agency is expected to continue in its fight against the eradication of hunger, for raising levels of nutrition and for addressing climate change.

At the same time, the Director-General reassured the 1,700 delegates attending the Conference regarding the Organization's plans to decentralize on a region-specific basis.

This, he added, would include reinforcing FAO's sub-regional offices and see the improvement of the agency's support in regions such as West Africa, Central Asia, the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean.

“I want to assure you that we will continue to do this without weakening the technical and normative capacity at Headquarters,” he continued.

“This is not magic. It is the result of streamlining administrative procedures, of cutting red tape so that we can do more and better with less.”

**In Turkmenistan, UN chief says future peace, development hinge on human rights**

13 June - All efforts for sustainable development and a stable future must involve a deep respect for human rights and the strengthening of rule of law, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon affirmed today as he concluded his five-day tour of Central Asia with a visit to Turkmenistan.

Speaking to a gathering of local officials and students at the University for Humanities and Development, during the presentation of the UN Academic Impact certificate in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, the Secretary-General applauded Turkmenistan’s encouraging steps towards a climate-friendly future amid the approval of a National Climate Change Strategy and the Government's declared intention to soon approve an action plan for moving toward a green economy.

In a region marred by climate, water and other environmental issues, Mr. Ban said he welcomed Turkmenistan’s efforts to work with its neighbours in order to find lasting and peaceful solutions to two of the world's most exacting problems: climate change and the
The Secretary-General's remarks come at a propitious time as the UN and the international community prepare to roll out a series of major events aimed at tackling the globally existential threat of climate change once and for all.

Next month, in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, for instance, delegates from around the world will meet to set out a framework for financing development. Just two months later in New York and ahead of the annual General Debate, world leaders will then adopt a new development agenda, including a set of Sustainable Development Goals, that will provide a roadmap to ending poverty by 2030 and “ensuring a life of dignity for all,” according to Mr. Ban. Finally, in December, Member States will once again meet, this time in Paris, to commit to a “meaningful, universal climate agreement” at this year's critical Climate Conference.

Despite all these efforts, however, the Secretary-General cautioned that the road to development must be sustained by a deep commitment to human rights.

“There is no peace without development. No development without peace. And neither is possible without a respect for human rights,” he stated.

Adding that violations of human rights are “often warning signs of much worse to come,” Mr. Ban reminded those gathered of his Human Rights Up Front initiative which worked to address human rights violations before they escalate.

To that point, he voiced concern about the perceived “deterioration of some aspects of human rights – a shrinking democratic space” across Central Asia. Curbing freedoms, he said, might create “an illusion of stability in the short-run” but ultimately would foster “a breeding ground for extremist ideologies.”

“The failure to respect human rights, build accountable institutions, promote political participation, and ensure opportunity for all creates gaps,” continued the Secretary-General. “Young people should be sent a message: democracy in Central Asia can work.”

“Around the world, the way to confront threats is not more repression, it is more openness. More human rights. The road to a stable future is by strengthening the rule of law. By fighting corruption. By ensuring an independent judiciary. By guaranteeing free media. By building just societies. By empowering citizens,” he added.

In separate remarks to the press, delivered later in the day alongside the Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Mr. Ban reiterated the importance of human rights for development as he hailed the Turkmen Government's decision to establish an Office of the Ombudsman to protect and promote human rights in the country.

“It is important that this institution, the Ombudsman, meets the Paris Principles that are internationally agreed standards on the status of national human rights institutions,” he said, adding that the UN remained read to provide any possible assistance. “We look forward to continuing to work closely with the government and people of Turkmenistan to advance the United Nations pillars of peace, development and human rights.”

Meanwhile, during his concluding visit to the region, the UN chief also paid a visit to the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, located in Ashgabat and with a mandate to develop activities in order to help Central Asian states address regional challenges and facilitate closer cooperation.

Meeting with staff members, Mr. Ban emphasized how preventive diplomacy remained one of his top priorities to ensure the development of common understandings.

“The Centre has worked with the countries of Central Asia, developing activities to support their efforts to address regional challenges, encouraging and facilitating closer cooperation, identifying and tackling potential sources of tension and responding to domestic and transnational threats to peace and security, including through promoting the respect for human rights,” he explained.
“I am convinced that preventive diplomacy remains a sensible and cost-effective tool for maintaining international peace and security and creating conditions for steady and sustainable development.”

The Secretary-General is expected to depart from the region this evening.

On first-ever International Day, UN celebrates people with albinism and urges awareness of challenges they face

13 June - The first-ever day for International Albinism Awareness is an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of people with albinism and join the struggle against the difficulties they face, senior United Nations officials said.

Due to a recessive gene that is carried by both parents, babies in every society are born with albinism. Across the world, these children are likely to face bullying, prejudice and even violence because of stereotypes based on their colouring. Additionally, the common lack of melanin pigment in hair, skin and eyes causes their vulnerability to sun exposure, which can lead to skin cancer and severe visual impairment.

“They frequently cannot access adequate healthcare,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said in a statement commemorating the Day. “Failure to accommodate this visual impairment, as well as mockery and abuse, may force them to drop out of school; compounded by widespread social rejection, this can result in unemployment, isolation and life-long poverty.

In some parts of the world, people with albinism may also suffer horrific, and even lethal, atrocities.

The High Commissioner elaborated, “civil society activists have reported that hundreds of people with albinism – a majority of them children – have been killed, mutilated or otherwise attacked in at least 25 African countries, because of the belief that their body parts confer magical powers. More cases remain undocumented because of the isolation of the victims, the secrecy surrounding ritual practices, and indifference. Shockingly, such crimes have seldom been investigated or prosecuted.”

Recently, discrimination and violence against individuals with albinism have been highlighted by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, as well as by the High Commissioner's Office (OHCHR).

“In coming weeks, a UN Independent Expert will be appointed to give an international voice to the concerns of people with albinism, and to contribute to protecting their rights,” said the top UN human rights official.

In Tanzania and Malawi, efforts are underway to develop nation-wide strategies to combat the violence and discrimination that they suffer. Meanwhile, civil society activists around the world continue their essential and inspiring work to fight stigma, combat harmful superstition and ensure that victims have access to justice, care and redress.

“There is no room in this 21st century for erroneous and harmful beliefs, or for discrimination on any grounds. People with albinism are just as deserving of dignity as every other human being. They have the right to live free from discrimination, deprivation and fear,” Mr. Zeid underscored.

He called on States to step up education to: counteract albinism ignorance; provide appropriate care; investigate cases of discrimination and violence against people with albinism; and enforce the law. Mr. Zeid also encouraged civil society activists and human rights institutions to continue reporting on the human rights of people with albinism around the world.

“Awareness is the groundwork for action, and this first International Albinism Awareness Day is a beacon of hope for people with albinism everywhere,” the High Commissioner concluded.

In a separate statement, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Violence against Children, Marta Santos Pais,
said the lives of children with albinism are surrounded by marginalization, discrimination, prejudice, superstitions and misconceptions simply because of their genetic condition and because they look different. Discrimination condemns these children to a position of extreme vulnerability, and to tolerance of violence against them in many countries in the world.

“The serious violations of the rights of children with albinism to survival and development, to protection from discrimination and to freedom from violence remain a priority concern for my mandate” said Ms. Santos Pais.

She stressed that the International Awareness Day is a unique opportunity to promote laws and policies to better protect children with albinism from all forms of violence and to overcome social conventions that lead to stigmatization and to the extreme social and structural discrimination.

**Remittances from Europe topping $109 billion provide lifeline to millions worldwide, says UN agency**

15 June - According to a report released today by the Rome-based United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), migrant workers living in Europe last year provided a lifeline to more than 150 million people around the world by sending home $109.4 billion in remittances.

A key finding of the report on remittances from migrants based in Europe, Sending Money Home: European flows and markets, flags that benefits for families back home could be significantly higher if they had access to more competitive money transfer markets and targeted financial services to help save and/or invest their funds.

IFAD President Kanayo F. Nwanze underscored: “We need to make sure that this hard-earned money is sent home cheaply, but more importantly that it helps families build a better future for themselves – particularly in the poorest rural communities where it counts the most.”

On the sending end, Western Europe and Russia accounted for 75 per cent of the flows. In 2014, the six top-ranked sending countries were the Russia ($20.6 billion); the United Kingdom ($17.1 billion); Germany ($14 billion); France ($10.5 billion); Italy ($10.4 billion); and Spain ($9.6 billion).

Despite these numbers, the report notes that remittances amounted to less than 0.7 per cent of individual country (gross domestic product) GDP – representing an insignificant outflow of wealth from the host countries.

On the receiving side, in 2014, about one third, or $36.5 billion, of European remittances went to 19 countries in the Balkans, the Baltics and Eastern Europe, including 10 European Union member States. The remaining two thirds, or $72.9 billion, went to some 50 developing countries outside of the continent.

Of the 19 European remittance-receiving countries, the report showed that nine agriculture-based economy States relied heavily on Europe flows – highlighting a GDP representation of 22 per cent in Moldova and 17 per cent in Kosovo. Beyond Europe, Northern Africa and Central Asia were the regions most reliant on European flows, largely from France and Russia, respectively.

As unprecedented numbers of refugees fleeing conflict enter Europe, the report also notes that the continent was a source of considerable remittances to fragile States – including Iraq, Mali, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen – with the potential to help stabilize and rebuild, if better leveraged.

While the majority of remittances are used for basic goods, such as food, clothing, shelter, medicine and education, studies indicate that up to 20 per cent could be available for savings, investments or to repay loans for small businesses.

With 40 per cent going to rural areas – estimated to equal at least three times official development assistance to developing countries – the report suggests that remittances play a critical role in transforming vulnerable communities.
Mr. Nwanze emphasized that the immense potential of remittances for development is still largely underutilized but it is within our capacity to make every hard-earned euro, ruble, pound, krona, or Swiss franc sent home count even more.

If migrant workers and receiving families in rural areas had more options to utilize their funds, such as improved access to basic financial services – like savings and credit – and non-financial – including technical assistance for business development or financial education programmes – IFAD estimated that of the $80 billion globally that could be available for investment, about $34 billion could be for rural areas.

“Remittances offer a unique opportunity to bring millions into the formal financial sector,” said Pedro De Vasconcelos, co-author of the report and Coordinator of the Financing Facility for Remittances at IFAD. “Given the frequent interaction between remittance senders, receivers and the financial system, remittances could spark a long-term and life-changing relationship.”

While significant progress has been made over the last few years to lower transfer costs, Mr. De Vasconcelos added that more could be done through increased competition. By reducing transfer costs to 5 per cent, as per the G20 objective set in 2009, an additional $2.5 billion would be saved for migrant workers and their families back home.

The report will be presented in Milan from 16 to 19 June at the fifth Global Forum on Remittances and Development, where Heads of State, policymakers, private sector stakeholders and civil society leaders aim to map out the road ahead for enhanced remittances.

The Forum will open with the first observance of the International Day of Family Remittances.