UN officials urge continued support for Haiti as country prepares ‘historic’ elections

15 July - Haiti’s impending elections will be an “historic milestone” for the Caribbean country as it continues on its journey toward economic and political recovery, according to two senior United Nations officials.

“It has not been easy to arrive at this moment. The Haitian people have been waiting three years for these elections,” Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous and UN Development Programme (UNDP) Director for Latin America and the Caribbean Jessica Faieta declared in an op-ed published today in the Miami Herald.

“The country has made significant strides to restore confidence in the political process and to hold elections on time.”

The opinion piece was released ahead of a meeting tomorrow, 16 July, at United Nations Headquarters, where United Nations officials, the Prime Minister of Haiti, Government representatives and international partners will reaffirm common commitment to the democratic consolidation of the country and solidarity with its people’s aspirations and hopes for progress.

The elections – set to kick-off on 9 August – are wide-ranging in their scale and complexity. Some 6 million Haitians will vote for 1,280 representatives for local administrations, 140 mayors, 139 Parliamentarians and for the President. The several rounds of electoral processes could last until the end of the year and will aim to restore the country’s Parliament, which has been absent since January.

The officials noted that the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the UN Development Programme (UNDP)
and other UN partners have invested significant effort over recent years to strengthen national electoral capabilities. Indeed, thus far, the joint effort by the national authorities and international donors has generated enough resources to finance only the first round of polls.

Moreover, despite the great efforts so far achieved, Mr. Ladsous and Ms. Faieta both warned that much more has yet to be done for Haiti to complete the major elections and press ahead with its socioeconomic recovery, especially with a number of challenges still facing the country.

Haiti, for instance, continues to reel from the devastating 2009 earthquake which flattened large swathes of the island nation and killed more than 200,000 people. A cholera epidemic which caused 9,000 deaths and affected more than 735,000 people subsequently emerged in the earthquake’s aftermath in October 2010.

Moreover, the series of disasters came at a particularly delicate time for the nation. The country itself was already attempting a political and economic recovery following the popular uprising that removed former Haitian President Jean-Claude Duvalier’s years in office.

Mr. Ladsous and Ms. Faieta noted, however, that from the days of the Duvalier Presidency to this summer’s elections, a “vibrant” democracy had erupted across Haiti.

Today, alone, over 38,000 candidates will be represented at the polls.

“We cannot stop here. We appeal to all of Haiti’s international partners to step up their efforts and support Haiti in crossing the finish line of this march toward peace and stability,” the two senior UN officials wrote in the United States-based newspaper. “While important contributions have been received from Haiti’s partners, there is a crucial gap that needs to be filled. Without this support, the completion of the electoral cycle risks being jeopardized, as does Haiti’s hard-won progress.”

The officials stress that the upcoming elections will mark the longest period of institutional stability that the country has enjoyed in its recent history. It will be the second time since 2006 that a democratically elected president will hand over power to his successor.

“The process will have a positive effect on the sub-region, promoting socioeconomic development and regional stability,” they said.

**ADDIS: successful outcome at UN financing conference vital for future development agenda – Ban**

15 July - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today stressed that a successful outcome at the United Nations financing conference in Ethiopia is vital for the future sustainable development agenda and could shape international cooperation for years to come, as negotiations on the draft text entered its final stages.

“This Conference shows the way forward – with governments, international organizations, financial and trade institutions, business, and civil society all working together for sustainable development,” Mr. Ban told reporters in Addis Ababa. “I am very encouraged by the strong momentum and ownership among all partners.

He also noted that several new initiatives and commitments have been announced this week, which are an important pillar of the outcome of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. More such announcements will come today and tomorrow, as well as in the weeks and months ahead.

“Taken together, the results here in Addis Ababa can give us the foundation of a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development that should leave no one behind,” Mr. Ban stated.
“I urge the negotiators to keep that goal in mind as they finish their work. I look forward to working with all partners to seize the opportunities of the months ahead and to build a world of prosperity and dignity for all.”

The draft outcome document, which will be known as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda once adopted, presents an “ambitious financing framework” that includes concrete policy commitments in at least six crucial areas.

These include a new social compact for quality investment; a package for least developed countries, including a commitment to increase official development assistance; and a new Technology Facilitation Mechanism that aims to break new ground to help facilitate the development, transfer and dissemination of relevant technologies for the sustainable development goals.

The draft also calls for greater international cooperation in tax matters to stem the tide of illicit financial flows; mainstreams gender equality throughout the financing for development agenda; and makes clear that everyone's actions need to be underpinned by a strong commitment to protect and preserve the planet.

“A successful outcome is crucial for building trust and momentum towards the adoption of an ambitious post-2015 development agenda in New York in September and a universal agreement on climate change in December in Paris,” said Mr. Ban.

**With Libya now at a ‘critical stage,’ UN envoy says all parties must back political dialogue process**

**15 July** - A peaceful transition in Libya will only succeed through a significant and coordinated effort in support of a future Government of National Accord and by ensuring that sufficient security is achieved throughout the country so that public administration can resume its key functions, the top UN official in Libya told the Security Council today.

“A Government of National Accord can be the only interlocutor through which the growing threat of Da’esh [also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL] and its affiliate groups can be effectively tackled, UN Special Representative for Libya Bernardino León said as he briefed the Council on the situation in the country.

Reiterating UN support in ensuring national ownership in the transition process, he also said: “I am confident that the international community is ready to offer the needed support based on the priorities that the Libyans will identify.”

Over the past month, he explained, the situation in Libya has continued to deteriorate amid significant political fragmentation and violence. The “chaos” on the ground has also given way to an expansion of extremist groups, with a “vacuum of authority” exploited by human smugglers, as many refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are using the country as a “launching area for an unprecedented surge in dangerous crossings of the Mediterranean.”

Nonetheless, Mr. León, who also heads the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), said he was pleased to report to the Council that, on 11 July, a number of courageous Libyan leaders had initialed a political agreement at UN-facilitated talks that had been under way in Skhirat, Morocco.

“This act signaled the adoption of a framework for further talks and has brought the country one step closer to ending the conflict and fulfilling the goals of the 2011 revolution.”

This agreement, he explained, will allow Libya to complete the transition that started in 2011. Including guiding principles, it puts in place institutions and decision-making mechanisms to guide the transition until the adoption of a permanent constitution.

Reporting on the security situation on the ground, the Special Representative said that in western Libya, local ceasefires and reconciliation agreements have improved the security situation and allowed for an improvement in the humanitarian
situation. “A growing rapprochement between the cities of Misrata, Warshafana, Zawia and Zintan has been instrumental in facilitating these ceasefires.”

In central Libya, Da’esh-affiliated militants had established full control over the city of Sirte and the surrounding coastal area. Misrata forces had withdrawn to the area of Abu Grain, some 75 kilometers east of Sirte, but continue to carry out airstrikes and block Da’esh advances westward. But the prevailing political and security divisions within the country have prevented the development of a coordinated policy to deal with the threat of Da’esh affiliates, observed Mr. Léon.

And in Benghazi, clashes between the Benghazi Revolutionary Shura Council and Operation Dignity continue with neither side making significant gains, while the Benghazi Revolutionary Shura Council’s early July offensive has not changed the situation on the ground.

“The situation in Benghazi, birthplace of the revolution, remains of serious concern. We must refocus our efforts on this city in particular, to try and put an end to the fighting, which has caused so much destruction.” The overall humanitarian situation continues to cause concern, Mr. Léon added, noting that the number of internally displaced doubled since last September.

Encouraged by the recent release of prisoners in various Libyan cities over the past weeks, Mr. León called for the release of “all those illegally detained” without further delay. “Such measures are not only a matter of human rights: they would contribute significantly to facilitating the next phase of the political dialogue and to reconciliation.”

In Tripoli, he continued, the last session of the trial of Saif al-Islam Qadhafi, Abdullah al-Senussi, and 35 other former regime officials for violations committed during the 2011 conflict, took place on 20 May, and the verdict is expected on 28 July.

“Libya must overcome this dark chapter in its history by holding those responsible for serious crimes accountable, in accordance with international standards for due process and fair trial.

Libya is at a critical stage, he concluded, and it is my duty “to urge all parties…to continue to engage constructively in the dialogue process.” He underscored that spoilers should be held accountable, as they bear the responsibility of hindering the political agreement.

“At one again we must join together and send an unequivocal message that only through dialogue and political compromise, can a peaceful resolution of the conflict be achieved.”

**Millions need relief from ‘terrifying’ violence in Yemen – top UN humanitarian official**

15 July - As millions face “terrifying” violence, extreme hunger and little medical aid in Yemen, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator today expressed deep concern over the “catastrophic” situation, and renewed his appeal for an “immediate and unconditional humanitarian pause.”

“I call again on all parties to the conflict to agree an immediate and unconditional humanitarian pause across the country,” Stephen O’Brien, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, said in a statement just days after an expected humanitarian pause failed to take hold over the past weekend.

“I am even more deeply concerned by the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Yemen,” said Mr. O’Brien, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

A separate note issued in the capital of Sana’a today by the humanitarian community in Yemen, including the United Nations, said the country this week has seen some of the deadliest days recorded since the conflict escalated in March and appealed for access to and funding for the staggering four out of five Yemenis in need of aid.
“To scale up, the humanitarian community urgently requires funding,” according to the humanitarian team. “Yemen’s humanitarian appeal has received only 15 percent of the requested $1.6 billion required until the end of 2015.

In his statement, Mr. O’Brien urged the parties to abide by their obligations under international law to protect civilians and facilitate rapid, safe and “predictable access” for humanitarian workers to reach all people who need assistance, wherever they are in Yemen.

“Millions of women, children and men are facing terrifying violence, extreme hunger and little medical assistance as the fighting, shelling and bombing by all parties show no sign of abating,” he said.

“Despite the continued fighting, our humanitarian colleagues and their partners on the ground have been able to distribute some vital aid for the families in desperate need,” he said. “However, it is not nearly enough and we need access and funds to rapidly scale up critical humanitarian supplies and services.”

He went on to say that “a political solution to this conflict is what the people of Yemen need and I hope that the international community will do all it can for the Yemeni families who are counting on this.”

The statements today come a day after the United Nations reported that Yemen is impacted by one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world with 21 out of 25 million people in need of aid with the civilian death toll since 26 March at 1,670 and another 3,829 people injured.

After nuclear deal, Iran must now focus on human rights – UN expert

15 July - The latest agreement between the Government of Iran and negotiations from six nations on limiting the scope of the Gulf country’s nuclear programme has opened the door to further discussion of the Iranian human rights situation, according to an independent United Nations expert.

“Peace, development and human rights are deeply interlinked,” declared UN Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed, who is mandated by the UN Human Rights Council to monitor and report on the situation in Iran, in a news release issued earlier today.

“It is my sincere hope that the successful conclusion of the nuclear talks, which will enable the lifting of economic sanctions, will allow President Hassan Rouhani to focus on his other campaign pledges, specifically those to promote the enjoyment of all human rights by the Iranian people.”

Mr. Shaheed has long voiced concern about the impact of economic sanctions on the human rights situation in Iran in various reports presented to the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

In particular, he has noted that the increasing economic hardships caused by the sanctions have unleashed staggering inflation and generated serious concern regarding protections for the rights to food and health in the country.

“Economic sanctions have directly or indirectly affected all sectors of the country. They appear to have contributed to the conditions of austerity including the rising costs of basic commodities, and have seemingly impacted access to medicines, and medical supplies,” the UN expert continued. “These circumstances have had a dramatic effect on the standard of living and likely further undermined the full enjoyment of a range of civil, social and economic rights.”

At the same time, the Special Rapporteur urged the Iranian Government to spare no effort in addressing the long-standing human rights concerns repeatedly raised by the UN, including the alarming rise in executions over the past year, increasing restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful assemblies, women’s rights, discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities, and the ongoing prosecution of journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders.
Most recently, Mr. Shaheed has expressed concern about the arrest, detention and trial of Jason Rezaian, a Washington Post reporter, and his wife, Yeganeh Salehi, a correspondent of the United Arab Emirates newspaper The National.

Mr. Rezaian’s trial began in late May in Teheran behind closed doors on charges of ‘espionage, collaboration with hostile governments, gathering classified information and disseminating propaganda against the Islamic Republic.’ The journalist has been arbitrarily detained since July 2014, including for a number of months in solitary confinement, and wasn’t formally charged for nearly 10 months.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs such as Mr. Shaheed are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

As Europe confronts Greek debt crisis, UN expert says new measures must not lose sight of human rights

The implementation of new austerity measures in Greece amid the country’s deteriorating economic crisis must not come at a cost to human rights, a United Nations expert warned today as he urged international institutions and the Greek Government to make “fully informed decisions” before adopting additional reforms.

“I am seriously concerned about voices saying that Greece is in a humanitarian crisis with shortages in medicines and food,” Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, the UN Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights, stressed in a press statement today. “Priority should be to ensure that everybody in Greece has access to core minimum levels of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to health care, food and social security.”

“A debt service burden that may be sustainable from a narrow financial perspective may not be viable at all if one considers the comprehensive concept of sustainable development, which includes the protection of the environment, human rights and social development,” he added.

Mr. Bohoslavsky’s appeal comes just days after the Government of Greece and European institutions came to a bailout agreement requiring the Mediterranean country to undergo substantial reforms aimed at reducing the cost of the public sector.

Speaking from Addis Ababa where he is currently participating in the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the UN expert cautioned, however, that there remained a need to integrate social and distributional aspects in debt sustainability analysis to make fully informed decisions before new austerity measures.

“Greece seems to be already in a situation in which insolvency and illiquidity are indistinguishable,” he continued.

To that point, he noted the fissures in opinion on the substance of the new agreement between experts at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Eurozone leaders.

On Tuesday, the IMF, in fact, suggested that debt relief in the form of a so-called ‘haircut’ would have been the better choice to bring Greece’s debt back to sustainability. Mr. Bohoslavsky admitted that such an approach would have also helped reduce the country’s “unhealthy dependence on creditor institutions and reflect the principle of co-responsibility in the built-up of the public debt of Greece.”

At the same time, the nature of the new agreement also called into question the nature of democratic institutions within the European framework, according to the UN expert, who referred to the recent referendum held by the Greek Government and which resulted in an overwhelming vote against further austerity. The referendum, he observed, appeared to produce little positive response from Greece’s official creditors.

“If this people’s democratic pronouncement becomes almost irrelevant, there is obviously a great challenge in Europe on
how the democratic dialogue integrates national, regional and financial interests at stake when negotiating debt agreements without compromising human rights."

Mr. Bohoslavsky has been invited by the Government of Greece to undertake an official visit to the country from 30 November to 7 December. He also plans to meet representatives from European institutions, the IMF and main creditor countries.

**UNESCO chief denounces murder of Honduran journalists**

15 July - The Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Irina Bokova, today denounced the killing of three journalists in Honduras, reiterating that crimes against media workers cannot be allowed to go unpunished.

“I condemn the killing of Jacobo Montoya Ramírez, Juan Carlos Cruz Andara and Joel Aquiles Torres,” Ms. Bokova said. “Using violence to silence journalists cannot be tolerated because it is also an attack on society as a whole. I call on the authorities to end impunity for crimes against journalists and ensure that their perpetrators are brought to justice.”

Juan Carlos Cruz Andara, a reporter with the TV broadcaster Teleport, was found stabbed to death in his home in the northern city of Puerto Cortés on 23 June, approximately five months after reporting to the police that he had received a death threat.

Broadcast journalist Jacobo Montoya Ramírez was gunned down in his home in the western town of Copán Ruinas on 25 June.

Joel Aquiles Torres, owner of local TV station Canal 67, was shot dead while driving his car in Taulabe in the department of Comayagua, on 3 of July.

The Director-General of UNESCO issues statements on the killing of media workers in line with Resolution 29 adopted by UNESCO Member States at the Organization's General Conference of 1997, entitled “Condemnation of Violence against Journalists.” These statements are posted on a dedicated webpage, UNESCO condemns the killing of journalists.

**Cambodia: UN expert urges authorities to reject bill that 'threatens very existence of free society'**

15 July - United Nations human rights expert Maina Kiai today urged Cambodia to reject a draft law that would allow authorities to shut down and criminalize any group advocating for human rights, basic freedoms and good governance, saying “it is not too late to reverse the course of action.”

The draft Law on 'Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) is scheduled to be examined by the Senate following its approval on Monday by the Cambodian National Assembly, according to a press release issued by Mr. Kiai, who is the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.

“Should the draft law be adopted, any group advocating for human rights, basic freedoms and good governance can be shut down and criminalized,” he said. “It will ultimately have a disastrous impact on Cambodian citizens' democratic participation in furthering the development of their country.”

“I urge the Senate to reject entirely the Bill as it falls significantly short of international human rights norms governing freedom of association, in particular Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Cambodia acceded in 1992,” Mr. Kiai said.
Mr. Kiai’s present appeal has been endorsed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye.

According to the press release, under the draft law, authorities will be able to de-register local and international associations and NGOs if they consider them as not “politically neutral” and similarly deny registration on the vague grounds that the purpose and goal of the associations or NGOs “endanger the security, stability and public order or jeopardize national security, national unity, culture, traditions, and customs of Cambodian national society.”

And associations and NGOs operating without registration in Cambodia will face criminal liability, it said.

“Equally troubling is the fact that there was no meaningful and transparent consultation with civil society throughout the drafting process,” Mr. Kiai said. “Despite repeated requests from a wide range of stakeholders, no draft was publicly released for several months until after the text was already approved by the Council of Ministers and submitted to the National Assembly.”

He went on to reiterate his offer of assistance to the Government and legislature, made on numerous occasions, “to help ensure that the draft law complies with international human rights law.”

“It is not too late to reverse the course of action,” said Mr. Kiai, who was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council as the first Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in May 2011.

The special rapporteurs are experts in their field of human rights, independent from any government or organization, work on a voluntary basis, are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work.

**ADDIS: first UN World Youth Skills Day celebrates importance of empowering young people**

**15 July** - On the first-ever commemoration of *World Youth Skills Day*, United Nations officials today declared that investing in developing the skills of young people can help build a more just and sustainable future for all and is one of the most important decisions any country can make.

While, overall, more young people have greater educational opportunities than in the past, there are still some 75 million adolescents who are out of school, denied the quality education they deserve and unable to acquire the skills they need, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted in his message for the Day, observed on 15 July.

“We may see an understandably frustrated youth population, but that picture is incomplete,” said Mr. Ban. “With the right skills, these young people are exactly the force we need to drive progress across the global agenda and build more inclusive and vibrant societies.”

He went on to say that skills development reduces poverty and better equips young people to find decent jobs. It triggers a process of empowerment and self-esteem that benefits everyone. And it strengthens youth capacity to help address the many challenges facing society, moving us closer to ending poverty hunger, injustice and environmental degradation.

“Healing wounds of war and conflict and promoting peace and development requires adequately skilled and motivated youth. On this Day, I call for investing politically and financially in developing the skills of young people so that they can help build a more just and sustainable future for all.”

The UN General Assembly declared 15 July World Youth Skills Day to raise awareness of the importance of developing youth skills. The Day is also in line with the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which Member States are expected to adopt in September, that include two goals on education and skills for employment.

Goal 4 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, while Goal 8 is to Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
8 is to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

The Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi, marked the Day in Addis Ababa, where representatives of governments, the private sector and civil society have gathered for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development with the aim of launching a renewed global partnership for sustainable development.

Ahmad Alhendawi talks about the importance of investing in youth and ensuring their access to decent jobs. Credit: UN News Centre

“When we think of about financing for development, we better think about investing in the largest asset that the world has today – its young people,” Mr. Alhendawi said in an interview with the UN News Centre.

“The smartest investment any country could make is to invest in its youth,” he emphasized. “That’s true in all countries around the world. That’s even more true in developing countries, where 90 per cent of young people today are found.”

According to the UN International Labour Organization (ILO), around 600 million jobs will be needed in the next 15 years to tackle youth unemployment.

**ADDIS: Africa's economic transformation in focus at UN development financing conference**

15 July - A lack of industrialization puts Africa's long-term growth at risk, a senior United Nations official said today, as participants at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development discussed the economic transformation of the continent.

“Manufacturing has stagnated over the continent during the past decade and makes up a shrinking share of Africa's exports,” said Carlos Lopes, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). “Africa's growth has struggled to create adequate jobs for its growing youth and the only way it's going to be able to do it is through industrialization.”

Mr. Lopes was one of several speakers at a side event at the conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that examined three critical issues for Africa's transformation: modernizing agriculture; inclusive and sustainable industrialization; and sustainable infrastructure and energy.

He noted that the shrinking contribution of agriculture to Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) has been accompanied by growth in the contribution of the services sector rather than industry or manufacturing. Industry and manufacturing have been in fact been contributing less and less to the continent’s GDP, excluding parts of North Africa, where its contribution has stagnated.

Africa currently accounts for less than two per cent of global manufacturing exports, Mr. Lopes pointed out. The percentage of manufactured goods in Africa’s exports to the world has fallen from 26 per cent in 1995 to 16 per cent in 2013. As a comparison, manufactured goods make 69 to 70 per cent of developing Asia’s global exports in 2013.

Donald Kaberuka, President of the African Development Bank, called infrastructure the “signature of African development.” He noted that over the last decade during which he has led the institution, the Bank has put out $28 billion for infrastructure. This is almost three times what the Bank has done over 40 years.

“This is because I concluded that the way African economies were growing, it was not possible to grow until we close the infrastructure gap,” he stated.

Giving an overview of the situation, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, told the
gathering that by 2013, only a third of Africa's population had access to electricity; 65 per cent had access to water; and only 38 per cent had access to sanitation. Also, in 2013, the continent spent four per cent of GDP on infrastructure, compared to 14 per cent by China in the same year.

For a continent with abundant land and water, she noted, Africa imports a “ridiculous” amount of food and suffers from food insecurity. According to the UNECA, Africa imported 83 per cent of its food items from outside the continent in 2013.

Ms. Zuma also stressed the need to move on the “African skills revolution,” and invest in empowering people – the young, women and men.

“We are determined that our generation shall not be one of missed opportunities. Instead, we will remain steadfast in playing our part… to build an Africa that is peaceful, integrated, people-centred and prosperous and takes its rightful place in the world.

Agnes Kalibata, President of AGRA [the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa], stated that sustainable and inclusive economic progress is nearly impossible when large segments of the continent’s population are stuck in subsistence farming.

“While African economies have been growing and rising over the last 10 years, the vast potential of its agriculture has remained largely untapped,” she said, adding that evidence shows that investments made in the agriculture sector are considered more effective than investments made in many other sectors at reducing poverty and producing economic benefits and inclusive growth.

“We also know that failing to invest in agriculture and smallholder farmers not only limits economic growth today but can also impede opportunities in the future. If farming families are unable to grow enough to feed their children, malnutrition will continue to grow with a severe cost to the human development of the next generation,” Ms. Kalibata stated.

“As we look to the future, we all share a collective responsibility to ensure that the 'Africa Rising' narrative is a reality for all Africans. There's no way this can be achieved without improving productivity and income for smallholder farmers.”

**ADDIS: Islamic finance should be utilized to fund sustainable development, UN conference told**

15 July - Islamic finance offers a promising alternative to traditional sources of funding and should be utilized to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that countries will adopt in September, participants at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development were told.

“In mobilizing resources for the SDGs, non-traditional sources of financing need to be given due attention,” Savas Alpay, Chief Economist of the Islamic Development Bank, said in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which is hosting the four-day Conference. “In this context, Islamic finance is offering a very promising alternative.”

The Bank announced this week that it will be doubling its development assistance activities from around $80 billion recorded during the MDGs period to more than $150 billion in the next 15 years to support programmes and projects for the successful realization of the SDGs in its 56 member countries.

“Islamic finance has gained traction around the world in recent years,” Mr. Alpay said, noting that it has a footprint in Asia and the Middle East, is ripe for growth in South America and Europe and has future markets in North America, Central Asia and Australia.

He cited certain prerequisites that have to be met for the successful implementation of the SDGs in a timely manner, namely financial stability, financial inclusion and shared prosperity. “Islamic finance offers promising potential solutions in these domains.”
Islamic finance is a financial system that operates according to Islamic law, or sharia. Like conventional financial systems, Islamic finance features banks, capital markets, fund managers, investment firms, and insurance companies. The difference being that these entities are governed both by Islamic law and the finance industry rules and regulations that apply to other banks.

Headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the Bank aims to foster the economic development and social progress of Muslim countries, as well as Muslim communities in non-member countries.

For over four decades, the Islamic Development Bank Group has funded short- and long-term development projects in various sectors of the economies of its member countries.

“The Islamic financial services industry has now supported many projects in the social, economic and environmental domains and it has great potential of being instrument in funding many components of the SDGs as well,” Mr. Alpay emphasized.

In implementing the SDGs, it is necessary to take bold and decisive actions, act firmly, fulfill existing commitments and pledge new ones, he stated.

“Each and every country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development. However, the depth of the current involvement with the SDGs requires that the international community act as one.”