World leaders to gather for 70th General Assembly at a time of ‘turmoil and hope’ – UN chief

16 September - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today he will convene a high-level meeting later this month to mobilize a “humane, effective and rights-based response” to a global crisis that has seen 60 million people flee their homes by an unprecedented number of brutal conflicts, the breakdown of basic governance and mounting economic despair.

Mr. Ban made the announcement at a wide-ranging news conference less than 10 days before world leaders gather at UN Headquarters in New York for general debate of the 70th session of the General Assembly at “a time of turmoil and hope.”

“Turmoil – because conflicts have deepened in so many places, and civilians are paying the price,” he said. “Hope – because a historic number of world leaders will gather here to forge solutions and adopt an inspiring new development agenda.”

The UN chief lauded the upcoming adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, set to take place next Friday, that “embodies the yearnings of people everywhere for lives of dignity on a healthy planet” and which “shows what Member States can achieve when they work together.”

On efforts to combat climate change, he expressed his concern that not enough is being done to keep temperature rise under the 2-degree Celsius threshold and urged world leaders “to raise ambition – and then match ambition with action.”

The Secretary-General, who has more than 100 one-on-one meetings with visiting dignitaries, said that “with political will and resources, we can transform our future and do more to prevent the kinds of crises we see in far too many places.”

On Syria, Mr. Ban said he will meet with the foreign ministers of the permanent members of the UN Security Council –
China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – to seek an end to a conflict in which “the combatants are defying all norms of humanity.”

In Yemen, where he said aerial attacks are devastating the civilian population, the UN chief urged the Yemeni parties to immediately rejoin the political process under the facilitation of his Special Envoy, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, saying “there is no military solution to this conflict.”

On the increasing humanitarian needs of civilians bearing the brunt of the mounting crises around the world, Mr. Ban said 100 million people – about one of every 70 people on earth – now need life-saving support but all appeals are chronically under-funded.

Citing the 60 million people displaced by brutal conflicts, breakdowns in basic governance, economic despair and other factors have generated displacements of people not seen since the Second World War, he noted the meeting he will convene on 30 September to tackle this issue.

“Men, women and children fleeing war and persecution deserve real support, including asylum,” he stressed. Advising “those standing in the way of the rights of refugees to stand in their shoes,” the UN chief also urged “all States to shoulder their responsibilities and live up to their legal obligations.”

In response to a question about the treatment of refugees and migrants on the border of Hungary and Serbia, Mr. Ban said he was “shocked” to see how they were treated. “It’s not acceptable,” he said.

Acknowledging “today’s crises highlight the failures of long-established peace and security and development responses,” Mr. Ban said he is calling for three key changes in UN peace operations.

These are an urgent emphasis on conflict prevention and mediation; steps to improve the speed and agility of UN peacekeeping and political missions; and deeper partnerships with regional organizations, in particular the African Union.

The Secretary-General also said that the future of UN peace operations also depends on concerted action to rid such operations of sexual exploitation and abuse. “It is shameful when UN and other personnel sent to protect people compound the suffering and become part of the problem,” he said.

The annual general debate will begin at UN Headquarters on 28 September. Member States will gather ahead of that, from 25 to 27 September, for the Sustainable Development Summit.

**UN official appeals to Security Council to find political solution to end nightmare for Syrian people**

16 September - The United Nations humanitarian chief today urged the Security Council to find a political solution to end the conflict in Syria, warning its members that the fighting had created one of the largest refugee exoduses since the Second World War.

“It is civilians who continue to bear the brunt of this war,” Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien told the Council, appealing to the 15-member body to find “a political settlement that brings an end to the crisis.”

Mr. O’Brien noted that, 18 months after the Security Council adopted resolution 2139, its demands to allow unhindered humanitarian access to the country had gone unheeded, and there had been no reduction in the appalling patterns of human rights violations.

Government forces, he said, had repeatedly attacked residential areas during between 17 and 26 August. During the last week of August, non-State armed groups had launched hundreds of shells, killing at least 20 civilians.
He warned of a “deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure,” including water and electricity networks, as well as schools and medical facilities.

In 2014, he said, some 169 reported attacks on medical facilities occurred, and 259 medical workers were killed. Additionally, since the start of 2014, the UN has verified at least 84 attacks on or near schools.

“Today, Syria is one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a child,” said Mr. O’Brien, noting that over two million children are not in school and a further 450,000 are at risk of dropping out. He also expressed his concern that, in areas controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), schools were using a curriculum designed by the terrorist group.

He also outlined the current state of humanitarian aid delivery in Syria, warning that the UN and non-governmental partners were still unable to deliver sufficient quantities of aid to the hardest-to-reach areas of the country.

Lack of funding, said Mr. O’Brien, continued to be a major challenge, and that $738 million was needed to fund essential life-saving operations until the end of 2015.

The Under-Secretary-General called on members of the Security Council to do more to demand an end to indiscriminate violence in Syria, and to ensure that humanitarian assistance is able to reach all areas of the country. Above all, he said, the Council should find a political solution to “end this nightmare” for the Syrian people.

Voicing outrage, Ban calls for immediate release of detained leaders of Burkina Faso

16 September - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon voiced his outrage at reports that President Michel Kafando of Burkina Faso, Prime Minister Yacouba Isaac Zida and several Government ministers have been detained by soldiers from the presidential guard.

“The Secretary-General calls for their immediate release. This incident is a flagrant violation of Burkina Faso's Constitution and Transitional Charter,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson, in the wake of today’s developments in the capital, Ouagadougou.

“The United Nations stands firmly behind the transitional authorities and President Kafando. The Secretary-General notes the strong support of the people of Burkina Faso for a peaceful transition and urges compliance with the transitional calendar, including the upcoming elections.”

According to media report, the country’s leaders were detained by guards supporting former President Blaise Compaoré during a cabinet meeting at the presidential palace. This comes two days after a commission reportedly recommended the disbanding of the presidential guard, the Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle.

The Secretary-General’s Special Representative for West Africa, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, is presently in Ouagadougou and working closely with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union and other international partners to support and safeguard the transition in Burkina Faso.

In early November 2014, thousands of Burkinabé protesters took to the streets in Ouagadougou, facing off with security forces outside the presidential palace amid deadly violence that included the ransacking of Government buildings and the state television headquarters.

Following the violence, Mr. Compaoré announced his resignation, ending his 27-year stay in office, and handed power over to the military. By the end of that month, the country officially marked the transfer of power to Mr. Kafando, as the Transitional President. A 26-member transitional government was subsequently appointed, and throughout, the Secretary-General called on all appointed leaders to work in a collaborative and harmonious manner.
UN urges creation of special court in Sri Lanka after new report confirms ‘horrific’ abuses

16 September - A new report released today by the United Nations human rights office has identified patterns of grave violations in Sri Lanka between 2002 and 2011, and recommends the establishment of a hybrid special court to ensure that justice is served.

“Our investigation has laid bare the horrific level of violations and abuses that occurred in Sri Lanka, including indiscriminate shelling, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, harrowing accounts of torture and sexual violence, recruitment of children and other grave crimes,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said in a news release.

“This report is being presented in a new political context in Sri Lanka, which offers grounds for hope,” he continued. “It is crucial that this historic opportunity for truly fundamental change is not allowed to slip.”

The report indicates that war crimes and crimes against humanity were most likely committed by both sides to the country’s conflict – the Government of Sri Lanka and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Among the most serious crimes documented in the report are numerous unlawful killings, sexual and gender-based violence, enforced disappearances, torture, child recruitment, attacks on civilians, denial of humanitarian assistance, and violation of the rights of internally displaced persons in closed camps.

The report also documents “years of denials and cover-ups, failure to carry out prompt investigations, stalled investigations and reprisals against the family members of victims and others who have pushed for justice,” states the news release issued by the UN human rights office (OHCHR).

Sri Lanka’s criminal justice system, says the report, is not adequately equipped to deal with the violations, as it lacks a reliable system for victim and witness protection and has been corrupted by decades of emergency, conflict and impunity.

As such, the report recommends the creation of a hybrid special court that integrates judges, prosecutors, lawyers and investigators, to ensure that justice is served, as well as a range of measures to develop a comprehensive transitional justice policy to address the human rights violations of the past 30 years and prevent their recurrence.

“Sri Lanka must now move forward to dismantle the repressive structures and institutional cultures that remain deeply entrenched after decades of erosion of human rights,” said the High Commissioner, who welcomed the positive steps taken by the new Government of President Mathiripala Sirisena since January.

“The levels of mistrust in State authorities and institutions by broad segments of Sri Lankan society should not be underestimated,” he said, adding that it is for this reason that the establishment of a hybrid special court is so essential.

“A purely domestic court procedure will have no chance of overcoming widespread and justifiable suspicions fuelled by decades of violations, malpractice and broken promises.”
Europe must change course on refugee crisis response, stresses UN agency

16 September - Only a united European emergency response can address the current refugee and migration crisis, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stressed today.

Individual measures taken by countries will make an already chaotic situation worse, furthering suffering and increasing tensions among States at a time when Europe needs solidarity, the agency added in a news release.

UNHCR voiced particular concern about a series of restrictive measures recently introduced by Hungary which it said have resulted in extremely limited access for refugees at the country’s border.

New legislation in the country includes deterrence measures, some of which run contrary to international law and European jurisprudence when applied to asylum-seekers and refugees, cautioned UNHCR. Reports also indicate that only a few asylum-seekers have been permitted to enter Hungary via the official border crossing point.

“UNHCR reiterates its call on the Hungarian authorities to ensure unimpeded access for people in need of protection in line with its legal and moral obligations,” said High Commissioner António Guterres.

“States should manage their borders in a way that is consistent with international and EU Law, including guaranteeing the right to seek asylum,” he added.

UNHCR said it was “shocked and saddened” to witness Syrian refugees, including families with children who have already suffered so much, being prevented from entering the European Union with water cannons and tear gas.

Hungary has also begun to return asylum-seekers to Serbia, against UNHCR advice to governments. The asylum system Serbia is currently in the process of building is not able to cope with the magnitude of the current inflow of people, said the agency.

Responding to a question about what was happening at the Hungarian border, where police were reportedly firing water cannons and tear gas at people, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told a news conference in New York that he was “shocked” to see how the refugees and migrants were treated.

“It’s not acceptable,” he stated, adding that refugees and migrants must be treated with human dignity and human rights.

Mr. Ban will convene a high-level meeting on 30 September to mobilize “a humane, effective and rights-based response” to the refugee crisis. “I urge all States to shoulder their responsibilities and live up to their legal obligations.”

On Tuesday, UNHCR proposed an emergency plan of action that called for the immediate creation of facilities in Greece to receive, assist, register and screen people arriving. It also called for the commencement of the relocation of 40,000 refugees to participating EU countries, as previously agreed, to be expanded with voluntary pledges by EU States.

It also asked for an emergency package from the EU to Serbia to establish sufficient capacity to assist, register and relocate people to other European countries, and stressed the need to substantially increase the opportunities for Syrian refugees being hosted in neighbouring countries to access legal channels to the EU.

As a growing number of refugees moves to enter Croatia, UNHCR has offered immediate support to the Croatian authorities and is mobilizing additional teams, relief items and equipment to Greece and Serbia.
UN welcomes new partnership and leadership to spearhead sustainable energy efforts

16 September - A firm foundation to ensure affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all has been built but a solid long-term institutional arrangement is needed, the United Nations Secretary-General said today, as he welcomed the creation of an international not-for-profit organization to spearhead renewable energy efforts.

“Energy is the golden thread that connects economic growth, social equity and a healthy environment,” Ban Ki-moon told participants at a briefing on the Sustainable Energy for All initiative (SE4All).

Launched by Mr. Ban in 2011, SE4All is a multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to achieve three inter-linked global targets, namely to ensure universal access to modern energy services, to double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency and to double the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix, all by 2030.

In 2015, access to affordable and clean energy became the 7th of 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that world leaders will adopt next week at a special summit at UN Headquarters. These Global Goals are intended to stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance towards building a more equitable and sustainable world for all.

“I strongly commend the inclusion of Sustainable Development Goal 7 on energy,” Mr. Ban continued. “With targets on access, renewables, energy efficiency and means of implementation, this goal is a game-changer – for everything from eradicating poverty to combating climate change. […] But we can, and must, do more.”

The Secretary-General announced that a new Sustainable Energy for All Partnership will now spearhead SE4All, and be led by the current World Bank Vice President and Special Envoy for Climate Change, Rachel Kyte.

In addition to becoming the first Chief Executive Officer of the Sustainable Energy for All Partnership, Ms. Kyte will also take over as the Secretary-General’s new Special Representative for Sustainable Energy for All on 1 January 2016.

“If we are successful over the next decade or more in realizing the ambition in SDG 7, we will be successful in realizing the ambitions in many more of the goals, not least of which will be SDG 13 [climate action],” the new CEO stated.

“Sometimes when we talk about energy, we talk about megawatts and kilowatts […]. But this agenda is firmly rooted in the ability of a woman to seek medical care in a hospital, knowing that the lights won’t go out. This is an agenda about being able to turn the irrigation pump on for the small farmer in a desertified part of the developing world. This is about being able to put the light on, do the homework, graduate, and go on and do more, and contribute back,” Ms. Kyte added.

Meanwhile, the outgoing Special Representative for SE4All said that if the world wants transformative change, it will need major financing and major deployment of technologies.

“To do that, we will need a new way of working with the private sector, not the philanthropic side of the private sector but in fact, the core investment part of the private sector,” Kandeh Yumkella underlined. “And that is what we’ve developed for you on the Sustainable Energy for All to drive about $120 billion a year into energy sector investments.”

He added that he believes one of Mr. Ban’s biggest legacies for the UN is that, under his leadership, he was able to establish an energy agenda for the Organization – something that has been attempted but unrealized for 20 years.

Also speaking at the event, Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said the international community now has, with this new
partnership, a tool to make sure it delivers on Global Goal 7.

“And I feel also supremely confident in the leadership transition from Kandeh’s dynamic strong leadership in the creation of this initiative, driving it forward, to Rachel Kyte now taking over, whom I’ve seen on the barricades of fighting for water and sanitation, climate change, and a number of issues where we have coinciding views.”

Following a competitive and transparent bidding process, the SE4All Executive Committee has chosen Vienna, Austria, to host the new Partnership.

‘Simple act of playing represents grave danger for children in Syria’ – UNICEF

16 September - The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has condemned in the strongest terms mortar attacks on civilian areas of Aleppo, Syria, which reportedly killed at least 19 children yesterday, including six in a UNICEF-supported child friendly space.

“Child friendly spaces enable children to play and reconnect with their childhood, and forget, even if for a short time, the horrors of war. They must never be targeted,” Hanna Singer, UNICEF Representative in Syria said in a statement.

“This reprehensible attack shows that even the simple act of playing represents a grave danger for children in Syria,” she added.

In recent weeks, several indiscriminate attacks have been reported in civilian populated areas leading to the death and injury of scores of children.

“These attacks highlight a flagrant disregard for the laws of war. They are a stark reminder that nowhere in Syria is safe for children,” Ms. Singer warned.

UNICEF is calling on all parties to the conflict in Syria to immediately halt such attacks and do their utmost to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure such as schools, health clinics and water facilities, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The agency urged that all civilians including children to be protected at all times.

In his briefing to the UN Security Council today, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Stephen O’Brien highlighted the impact of the conflict on Syria’s children and young people.

“Today, Syria is one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a child,” he stated, adding that over 5.6 million children are in need of immediate assistance. In addition, children continue to be murdered, tortured and subjected to sexual violence by all parties to the conflict. “Millions of children have been traumatized by the horrors they have witnessed.”

In addition, Mr. O’Brien noted that, although the school year commenced this past week, over two million children – one out of every three – are not in school in Syria, and an additional 450,000 children are at risk of dropping out. He also expressed his concern that, in areas controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), schools were using a curriculum designed by the terrorist group.
**Nigeria: UN rights expert condemns ‘heinous’ attack against displaced persons’ camp**

16 September - A “heinous” attack against a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Yola, north-eastern Nigeria, where some 32,000 people have found refuge, was strongly condemned today by an independent United Nations human rights expert.

“IDPs are amongst the most vulnerable persons and according to international human rights and humanitarian law they must be protected against any direct and indiscriminate attacks or other acts of violence against them or their camps or settlements,” Chaloka Beyani, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs, said in a news release.

On 11 September, at least seven people were killed and 14 others injured, including four officials from the National Emergency Management Agency, after the Malkohi IDP camp in Yola, in Adamawa state, was the target of a suicide bombing.

According to the news release, no party has so far claimed responsibility for the bombing, the first attack of its kind since the escalation of the crisis in northern Nigeria.

The expert stressed that those responsible must be held accountable and brought to justice. While appreciating the Government’s condemnation of the attack, he called for increased security measures where necessary to ensure the protection and human rights of IDPs.

Furthermore, in light of the screening of IDPs by security agencies, Mr. Beyani cautioned that “any security measures must not infringe on IDPs’ human rights, including their freedom of movement and family unity,” while noting that the vast majority of IDPs are “innocent victims” and their camps must retain their civilian character.

The expert also expressed his concern about recent attacks against IDP returnees in the state of Taraba. Over 2.1 million persons have been forced to flee their homes in north-eastern Nigeria since the intensification of Boko Haram’s violent insurgency and the declaration of the State of Emergency in May 2013.

“Food insecurity has been worsening combined with the lack of education, safe drinking water and health services,” Mr. Beyani warned, calling for an increase in humanitarian assistance to IDPs and communities hosting them in northern Nigeria.

He added that humanitarian organizations are doing the best they can under very difficult circumstances, but funding shortfalls and insecurity are preventing them from reaching all those in need.
World must protect climate as it preserved ozone layer, Ban says on International Day

16 September - A political commitment to manage hydrofluorocarbons under the Montreal Protocol – a huge environmental success that agreed to phase out ozone-depleting chemicals – could be one of the biggest climate change wins in the lead-up to the December’s climate conference, says United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

“Let us ensure that we protect our climate the way we have preserved the ozone layer,” Mr. Ban said in his message for the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer, observed annually on 16 September.

“Not so long ago, humanity stood on the brink of a self-inflicted catastrophe,” he recalled. “Our use of ozone-depleting substances such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) had torn a hole in the ozone layer that protects us from the sun’s harmful ultraviolet radiation.

“But we tackled this challenge,” he reminded citizens of the world.

The scientific confirmation of the depletion of the ozone layer prompted the international community to establish a mechanism for cooperation to take action to protect the ozone layer.

This was formalized in the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, which was adopted and signed by 28 countries, on 22 March 1985. In September 1987, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was drafted.

“Together, we have succeeded in putting the stratospheric ozone layer on the road to recovery by the middle of this century,” Mr. Ban said. “As a result, up to 2 million cases of skin cancer may be prevented each year, along with even more avoided cases of eye cataracts.”

Ahead of next week’s adoption in New York of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the effort by governments to forge a new, collective path forward on climate change later this year in Paris, the UN chief said the Montreal Protocol’s success should serve as inspiration.

Noting that the work of the Montreal Protocol is not yet done, the Secretary-General said hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) that have been used as replacements for many ozone-depleting substances are extremely potent greenhouse gases and will contribute a great deal of warming to an already overheated planet in the coming decades “unless we act now.”

“Many countries are now considering using the Montreal Protocol regime to phase down HFCs,” Mr. Ban said. “A political commitment to managing HFCs under the Montreal Protocol could be one of the biggest climate change wins in the lead-up to the Paris climate conference.”

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP), which serves as the Ozone Secretariat, is marking the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Convention.

As part of the commemorative activities, the Ozone Secretariat is conducting the “Precious Ozone” digital campaign to celebrate the many successes achieved under the ozone protection regime over the past 30 years and highlight the importance of the ozone layer in protecting life on Earth from the harmful effects of UV radiation.
Head of UNESCO deplores killing of Colombian journalist

16 September - The head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has denounced the recent killing of Colombian journalist Flor Alba Núñez Vargas.

Ms. Vargas, 25, was killed on 10 September in front of the building of La Preferida Estero radio station in Pitalito, Colombia, where she presented a daily news programme. She had also worked for television broadcasters Canal6, TV5 and Nación TV.

“A free press and a free society go hand in hand, attacks on the one weaken the other, so I urge the authorities to do everything to investigate this crime and bring those responsible for it to justice,” said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova.

Statements issued by UNESCO on the killing of media workers are posted on a dedicated webpage.