In the headlines:

- Ukraine: Security Council endorses Minsk ceasefire, calls on parties to fully implement truce
- Most pressing goal for Iraq remains defeating ISIL, says outgoing UN envoy
- Invest in cities, renewable energy, UN envoy Michael Bloomberg tells conference in India
- In Lebanon, UN official urges ‘calm, restraint’ along Blue Line
- Ebola: UN development chief begins last leg of West Africa mission
- In South Sudan, protection of civilians ‘critical part’ of UN mandate
- UN rights chief condemns murder of 21 Christians in Libya, urges rejection of ‘takfiri groups’
- Yemen: amid continuing instability, UN food agency urges increased humanitarian support
- UN launches ‘All In’ initiative to end adolescent AIDS
- As Kyoto Protocol turns 10, UN says ‘first critical step’ must trigger new 2015 emissions-curbing deal
- UN rights chief requests 'one time only' deferral of key report on Sri Lanka conflict
- Security Council, Ban condemn ISIL murder of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya

More stories inside

Ukraine: Security Council endorses Minsk ceasefire, calls on parties to fully implement truce

17 February - The United Nations Security Council today adopted a resolution endorsing the 13-point accord on ending the Ukraine crisis agreed in Minsk – including a cease-fire – and called on all parties to the conflict to fully implement that cessation of hostilities, as the UN human rights office expressed concern over reported shelling and trapped civilians in the country’s east.

Adopting a unanimous resolution, the 15-member Council endorsed the ‘Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements,’ which was adopted and signed in Minsk on 12 February. That agreement is annexed to the resolution. It states that the immediate and comprehensive ceasefire in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions went into effect on 15 February, 12am local time.

Today, Council Members also welcomed the Declaration by the Presidents of Russia, Ukraine, France, and the Chancellor of Germany in support of the Minsk Agreements (Annex II), and their continuing commitment to its implementation.

The Council called on all parties to fully implement the ‘Package of Measures,’ including a comprehensive ceasefire as provided for therein. It also decided to remain seized of the matter.

In a separate statement read out to reporters by Ambassador Jieyi Liu of China, which holds the Council’s presidency for the month, Council members expressed grave concern over the continued fighting in and around Debaltseve, Ukraine, which has resulted in numerous casualties.
The Council called on all parties to ‘immediately cease hostilities and abide by commitments agreed in Minsk,’ including facilitating access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to monitor and verify compliance with the Minsk Agreements. The Council further called on all parties to treat detained individuals humanely.

The Security Council said it regretted that despite the announcement of a ceasefire on 15 February, violence has continued in recent days in some parties of eastern Ukraine.

Echoing that sentiment, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) also expressed concern by reports of continued shelling and trapped civilians in Debaltseve.

While reliable information on the fighting or casualties in the area has yet to be verified, spokesperson Rupert Colville said “We believe there may be a few thousand hiding in cellars, struggling to get food, water and other basic necessities. It is unclear how many civilians are still there.”

Intense hostilities marked the days preceding the midnight ceasefire of 15 February, with dispatches reporting numerous military and civilian casualties.

Although the first two days of the truce witnessed a dramatic decrease in the number of causalities reported, especially amongst civilians, artillery and small arms exchanges did not cease completely.

“Theyir impact on civilian population, apparently, decreased considerably,” Mr. Colville confirmed. “So far we have only been able to document a few cases: two civilians were reported killed in Popasna in Luhansk region on Sunday, and several civilians were reported wounded in Avdiivka in Donetsk region on Monday.”

At the same, OHCHR continues to work on verifying these and other reports of civilian casualties during the ceasefire period.

The data available at this point reveals that since the beginning of the conflict – that began in mid-April 2014, until the 15 February truce – 5,665 people have been killed and 13,961 wounded in the east of Ukraine.

The UN Human Rights Mission in Ukraine and the World Health Organization (WHO) anticipate a further increase in figures in the coming days as casualty reporting during the ongoing hostilities, prior to the pre-ceasefire period was considerably delayed due.

The UN Human Rights Office will issue its next full report on the human rights situation in Ukraine on 2 March 2015.

The Ukraine crisis began to deepen in late February 2014 when it evolved from an initial internal political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country. It later reached full-scale conflict in the east. Despite an earlier Minsk cease-fire, the situation in Ukraine has since continuously deteriorated, with serious consequences for the country's unity, territorial integrity and stability.
Most pressing goal for Iraq remains defeating ISIL, says outgoing UN envoy

17 February - Delivering his final briefing as the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Nickolay Mladenov today stressed to the Security Council the optimism he feels for the country’s future, while tempering those hopes with fear over the many things that can go wrong.

“I am a paranoid optimist,” said Mr. Mladenov, noting the efforts made by Iraq’s political, community and religious leaders to save their country from terror. “Today, more than ever, there is a growing understanding that the country can only move forward based on the principles of democracy, rule of law, respect for diversity and inclusivity.”

Even though the national unity Government was set on addressing many long-standing concerns of the Iraqi people, Mr. Mladenov said that he remains “paranoid.”

“So many things can go wrong,” he warned. “ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) remains in control of most of Iraq’s western provinces, the fragile efforts towards unity and reconciliation need to be carefully nurtured if they are to bear fruit, while the economy has been hit by falling low prices and skyrocketing security costs.”

He pointed to the Government’s “important steps” on political and institutional reform, economic and social reconstruction and national reconciliation, as well as its efforts to engage countries in the region.

“Iraq’s most pressing goal remains to win back territory taken by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, ISIL,” he said. “The authorities have pledged to provide military and financial assistance to local leaders and tribal fighters to aid their struggle against ISIL.”

Moving forward would require expansion of the process of inclusion into the political sphere, as an exclusively military solution to the problem would be both impossible and counterproductive.

“ISIL flourishes when Iraq is weak,” he said. “Iraq is weak when it is divided by sectarian politics, when political patronage overtakes national loyalty.”

He drew attention to recent roundtables convened by the UN Mission (UNAMI) in Baghdad, Karbala and Basra which aimed at strengthening social and religious cohesions, as well as rectifying divisions within Iraqi society, and he also noted the improvement of relations between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Mr. Mladenov said many risks remained despite positive steps taken. He pointed to the toll taken by armed conflict and acts of terrorism, with over 12,000 civilians killed in 2014 and another 23,000 injured.

“Almost daily terrorist attacks continue to deliberately target all Iraqis, most notably the Shi’ite community, as well as ethnic and religious minorities across the country,” he said, decrying ISIL’s violations and abuses as “gruesome” and stressing the “serious threat” they posed to the country’s cohesion, with increasing reports of revenge attacks, and the marring of recent military gains by claims that militias have killed unarmed civilians.

The country was challenged also by fiscal constraints and UNAMI was working actively with the authorities to set up a Recovery and Reconstruction fund, while the challenge posed by supporting internally displaced persons was also huge.

He noted that 5.2 million people need humanitarian assistance, of whom 2.25 million are displaced and 235,000 are refugees...
from Syria, with the population of the Kurdistan Region having increased by 30 per cent because of the influx.

“Let me sound some alarm bells,” he said. “Sixty per cent of humanitarian operations in Iraq are likely to shut-down or be curtailed unless funding is received in the next few weeks. The food pipeline will break in mid-May unless funding is received before March. The essential medicines pipeline will break at the end of March.”

The UN’s humanitarian country team had listed fast track priorities which could not be postponed or ignored and he called for $150 million to support IDPs.

Mr. Mladenov also spoke about the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and property, pointing out that the Kuwaiti Government and people were “understandably disappointed” that nothing tangible has been achieved for many years on the matter.

With goodwill between Iraq and Kuwait at its highest now since 1990, he said it was an “opportunite moment” for the countries’ leaderships to come together on an important humanitarian issue.

**Invest in cities, renewable energy, UN envoy Michael Bloomberg tells conference in India**

17 February - Welcoming India’s efforts to confront climate change, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Cities and Climate Change, Michael Bloomberg, said today that the country was incredibly well placed to capitalise on the benefits of renewable energy.

Noting the Government’s plan to install about 100 gigawatts of solar power across the country by 2022, Mr. Bloomberg pointed to the major development benefits that the country could achieve, given the large amount of solar radiation it gets and the reduced level of infrastructure needed to pump solar energy into people’s homes.

“I imagine the signal it would send to the world if India were able to achieve its goal of bringing electricity to every household that lacks it, largely using clean solar power – at a fraction of the cost of the conventional grid,” said the Special Envoy during his keynote address to the ‘RE-Invest’ conference, aimed at scaling-up financing for renewable energy. “It would be a success story told – and copied – around the world.”

Mr. Bloomberg joined leading renewables and investment professionals from India and across the world at the RE-Invest conference, as part of a two-day visit to the country in which he advocated for increased renewables, smarter cities, sustainable transport and urban climate adaptation.

He arrived at the Conference in a rickshaw powered by compressed natural gas, which is a far cleaner alternative to the fuels that make Delhi one of the most polluted cities in South Asia. He noted that most of the world’s total carbon emissions stem from cities and sources like buildings, transportation and waste, over which at least limited control can be exerted.

“Steps to make those systems more efficient also make cities better places to live,” he said, stressing the difference such investments could make. “In New York City, we were able to reduce our carbon footprint by 19 percent in just six years while also making our air cleaner than it has been in more than 50 years, increasing life expectancy by three years, and leading the U.S. in creating new jobs. And India can do the same for its citizens.”

Mr. Bloomberg, who was mayor of New York for 12 years, said that those gains came not in spite of investments in sustainability but because of them and he stressed that the most effective economic policies for India would be those that improved people’s health and quality of life.

“The fact is: People want to live in cities with clean air and water, good public transportation, and streets that are safe for walking and biking. And where people want to live, businesses want to invest,” he said. “The good news is, as Prime Minister Modi is showing, confronting climate change goes hand-in-hand with smart economic growth. And from my
experience, he is absolutely correct to make cities a central focus of his work.”

With countries coming to Paris this December to reach a new climate change agreement, Mr. Bloomberg said that no country will commit to goals they don’t think they can reach, or that come at too great a cost to economic growth. However, countries are continuing to move forward because they realise the benefits of action – for their economies and the health of their citizens.

“India’s leadership is helping to show other countries how much is possible – by showing that clean-energy, climate-resilient growth is the path to a brighter future,” Mr. Bloomberg said. “We’re all in this together, and we have a great deal to learn from one another.”

**In Lebanon, UN official urges ‘calm, restraint’ along Blue Line**

*17 February* - All parties straddling the demarcation line between Israel and Lebanon must work to maintain the region’s delicate peace, the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Sigrid Kaag, said today as she made her first official visit to south Lebanon since assuming her current role.

“We hope all parties continue to exercise maximum calm and restraint, refrain from any action that could undermine the stability of the area and act responsibility to prevent any escalation in line with their commitment to resolution 1701,” Sigrid Kaag declared in a press release issued by her office earlier this morning.

The so-called “Blue Line,” or Line of Withdrawal, was established in the year 2000 to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon in conformity with Security Council resolution 425, according to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) website.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently expressed his concern over the serious deterioration in the situation in southern Lebanon and the violations of the cessation of hostilities agreements and resolution 1701, which ended the month-long 2006 war between Israel and Hizbollah in Lebanon.

During her visit to south Lebanon, Ms. Kaag met with Members of Parliament in the city of Tyre, stating that the meeting was “very useful” as it covered the political, security and socio-economic situation in the area. In addition, she engaged in consultations with UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander Major-General Luciano Portolano.

“As with each region of Lebanon, the south has particular needs and challenges,” she continued. “Working closely with local and national authorities, the UN is committed to helping meet those needs. Strong and effective institutions of the State are an essential element in the delivery of assistance and support.”

Underlying tensions and unresolved issues continue to beleaguer the Blue Line area. A recent cross-border exchange of fire between Hizbollah and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) resulted in the deaths of two IDF soldiers and Israel’s immediate retaliation. A UN peacekeeper was also killed in the ensuing violence.
Ebola: UN development chief begins last leg of West Africa mission

17 February - The top United Nations development official today began the last leg of her Ebola-recovery focused visit to West Africa a day after she witnessed the reopening of schools in Liberia and urged the international community to support “recovery from this terrible crisis” beyond the emergency phase.

Before leaving the Liberian capital, Monrovia, Helen Clark, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), said late Monday that the crisis will not be over until there are zero cases of Ebola, which has affected more 23,000 people, with some 9,300 deaths.

“It is clear that no one will be happy until there are zero cases across all three epicentre countries,” the UNDP Administrator told a press conference in Monrovia. “But the important message now is that international solidarity with Liberia should not end at the end of the emergency phase. It must continue in support of recovery from this terrible crisis.

Noting schools had re-opened in Liberia on Monday, shuttered for more than six months to help prevent transmission, were finally re-opened, she said Liberia was emerging from a “very traumatic time”. There was now, she said, reason for hope.

Tasked by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the lead the UN system's recovery efforts, UNDP is committed to working with Liberia as it follows its path to recovery in a way that is consistent with the Government and people’s own longer term development aspirations.

Among the highlights of her visit to Liberia, according to UNDP, was a meeting with Josephine Dolley, an Ebola survivor who lost 29 members of her family including her husband and three children. Ms. Dolley has adopted six children whom she met whilst in an Ebola Emergency Treatment Unit, all of them Ebola survivors who lost their parents and siblings.

The UNDP administrator also met with the so-called “Pink Panthers” motorcycle club, a group of women who offer motorbike taxi services. UNDP has been working with the women riders to find ways to make their jobs safer, including in the context of Ebola. Ms. Clark was invited to be an honorary member of the Pink Panthers, and was presented with her own pink jacket.

Ms. Clark also told the press conference that an upcoming meeting in Brussels, Belgium, would be aimed at maintaining international solidarity around achieving zero Ebola cases and considering the support needed to help Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone recover from the crisis.

As she began the final leg of her mission to the three-worst affected countries by the Ebola outbreak with a two-day visit to Sierra Leone, where she arrived late Monday, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced that Ebola-ravaged rural communities in Guinea will benefit from new food security initiatives.

FAO said tens of thousands of people in rural areas of Guinea worst-hit by the Ebola epidemic will receive training on how to prevent the spread of the disease and support in producing food and generating income, through an agreement involving the World Bank and the country’s government.

As part of the initiative, $5 million will be invested in FAO’s Ebola Response Programme, which aims to assist rural households whose livelihoods and access to food are severely threatened by the impact of Ebola.

Some 30,000 households will be sensitized on measures to counter the transmission of the disease in rural areas. Experienced rural development and extension field workers will undertake awareness activities combined with the provision of training to farmers on safe agricultural practices.
of hygiene kits to rural communities.

Beneficiaries include hunters and women who used to sell bush meat but lost this source of income after authorities banned this trade in order to reduce the potential risk of exposure to Ebola through contact with wildlife. The programme will also target women groups involved in rice-processing activities.

According to the latest FAO/World Food Programme Crop and Food Security Assessment, a total of 470,000 people might be food insecure by March 2015 due to the Ebola outbreak.

**In South Sudan, protection of civilians ‘critical part’ of UN mandate**

**17 February** - United Nations peacekeepers must continue to provide critical protections for civilians in South Sudan as the country slowly emerges from a year-long stretch of internecine conflict, the head of the UN Mission (UNMISS) there declared today.

During a visit to the city of Bor, Ellen Margrethe Løj, who is also the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for South Sudan, commended the efforts of the Second Ethiopian Battalion and UN civilian and military staff in maintaining the UNMISS mandate. More than 1,200 Ethiopian peacekeepers are currently deployed to monitor South Sudan’s fragile peace and maintain footholds in the cities of Malakal, Bentiu, and the capital, Juba.

“It is a critical part of the Mission’s mandate to protect civilians, both inside the UN camps and outside,” said Ms. Løj, as she reviewed the “blue helmets” at a Medal Parade. “Our troops must ensure safety and security beyond the camps, out in the communities. I am convinced that the Ethiopian Contingents will be in the front line in this regard.”

The security situation in South Sudan deteriorated steadily over the past year since political in-fighting between South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and his former deputy, Riek Machar, started in mid-December 2013. The hostilities subsequently turned into a full-fledged conflict that has sent nearly 100,000 civilians fleeing to UNMISS bases around the country. The crisis has uprooted an estimated 1.9 million people and placed more than 7 million at risk of hunger and disease.

Nonetheless, a recent peace deal between the warring factions has fostered hope of a definitive end to the year-long conflict.

In a press release, UNMISS reported that Ms. Løj also met with UN staff during a visit to the Organization’s compound in Bor where she remained “very impressed” by their efforts to adjust to the current situation. In addition, she congratulated them for their “commitment to the Mission’s mandate as they continue to protect civilians in Jonglei State including those sheltering in the Mission’s compound.”

According to estimates, some 112,000 civilians are currently protected by UNMISS at the Mission’s protection sites throughout South Sudan while more than 2,600 civilians have found safety in Bor alone.

The Special Representative also visited the Sri Lankan military field hospital which has treated 1,360 people since its founding in June 2014 and congratulated the medical staff for their dedication.
UN rights chief condemns murder of 21 Christians in Libya, urges rejection of ‘takfiri groups’

17 February - The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has said today that the beheading of 21 Christian men in Libya was a “vile crime targeting people on the basis of their religion” and urged Libyans to unite against extremists.

“The brutal murder of these men, and the ghastly attempt to justify and glorify it in a video, should be roundly condemned by everyone, in particular by the people of Libya who should resist the urgings of takfiri groups,” High Commissioner Zeid said, referring to the ideology where one believer apostasies another and then condemns them as impure. “Murdering captives or hostages is prohibited under international law and Islamic law.”

The mass beheading – of 20 Coptic Christians and apparently another Christian man – took place against the backdrop of increasing lawlessness in Libya as armed conflict continues.

“This is not the first time that Coptic Christians have been targeted in Libya or elsewhere in the region,” said Mr. Zeid. “UN human rights staff have documented several incidents involving abductions of Egyptian Copts in Libya.”

A UN human rights report on Libya was released last week, detailing rampant violence and lawlessness. It found that civilians in general are affected but specific groups, such as Coptic Christians, are targeted. In December last year, the bodies of three members of a Coptic Christian family were found in Sirte, while Churches and other religious sites have also been attacked in Libya over the past three years.

As the Egyptian Government launched airstrikes in response to the latest atrocity, Mr. Zeid warned that any response must ensure full respect of the principles of distinction between civilians and fighters, and civilian objects and military objectives.

Along with Coptic Christians, other minorities, as well as migrants, journalists and human rights defenders, are subject to attacks. On Saturday, UN staff received reports that the director of the human rights group, the National Commission for Human Rights, Hadi Ben Taleb, and one of its board members, Ahmed Osta, had been abducted by the al-Sa’dawi armed group in Tripoli.

No information has since emerged on their fate or whereabouts. Mr. Zeid called for the release of the two men and, pending that, for their relatives to be informed of their location.

The High Commissioner urged all parties in Libya to work towards a meaningful dialogue to bring to an end the current conflict. In particular, he urged constructive engagement with the efforts of Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Bernardino León to advance an inclusive political process aimed at addressing Libya’s daunting political and security challenges.

“This is the only solution,” said Mr. Zeid. “The path to a peaceful and prosperous Libya – like anywhere else – involves upholding everyone’s human rights, irrespective of faith, ethnicity or political affiliation. Joining, copying or giving in to groups that glorify blood-letting is akin to buying a one-way ticket to disaster, not just for yourself, but for your relatives and your entire society. Adopting extremist takfiri behaviour will simply add layer upon layer of suffering on an already suffering country – as we have seen all too clearly in Syria and Iraq.”
Yemen: amid continuing instability, UN food agency urges increased humanitarian support

17 February - As political uncertainty and violent clashes continue to keep Yemen in the grip of instability, the country's food situation is becoming increasingly insecure, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warned today, as the agency announced its determination to continue critical humanitarian relief operations across the country.

“In these difficult times, WFP’s role becomes even more important,” WFP Yemen Country Director Purnima Kashyap explained in a press release.

“Even before this crisis, more than forty per cent of Yemenis were food insecure, five million of them severely food insecure. And the current upheavals are certain to hit the poorest and most vulnerable hardest.”

Despite the formation of a new Government in November 2014 aimed at ending a period of political turbulence and bringing about a full transition towards democracy, Yemen continues to be plagued by violence and mass political demonstrations.

In recent weeks, the Secretary-General has voiced serious concern about developments following the abduction by the opposition group Ansarallah of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi’s chief of staff and the resignation of the President and Prime Minister amid a takeover of the capital, Sana'a by Houthi militants. This followed a steady deterioration since the beginning of the year as Government forces clashed with militant groups throughout the capital.

In his briefing to the Council last week, the UN chief also warned that “widespread and lethal” attacks by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and escalating hostilities between AQAP and the Houthis have pushed the country to the edge of civil war. These developments, coupled with a burgeoning humanitarian crisis which has enveloped an “astounding” 61 per cent of the population, now threaten regional and international peace and security, Mr. Ban added.

UN Special Adviser Benomar, who has continued to facilitate negotiations with all national stakeholders despite very difficult operational circumstances, also at that briefing, cautioned the Council that Yemen stood at a “crossroads.”

Against that backdrop, WFP noted that its current operations include providing critical food assistance to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) in conflict-affected areas, safety-net and livelihood support for vulnerable and poor families in rural areas, and the prevention and treatment of malnutrition among pregnant and breastfeeding women and young children.

As a result, the UN agency hopes to reach some 6 million people throughout the country during the current 2014 to 2016 biennium but, it added, it would require an additional $146 million in funding to support its main relief and recovery operation over the next 12 months.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that some 61 per cent of the population in Yemen is in need humanitarian assistance – that is almost 16 million Yemenis who desperately need food, clean water and sanitation. In addition, some 10.6 million people face food insecurity.

Ms. Kashyap appealed to donors to continue their support for WFP Yemen and called on neighbouring countries to provide funding “in the interests of regional stability.”

“We are very concerned about how people are managing to cope with the latest upheaval. They are likely to be eating less and not as frequently, which can only lead to increased food insecurity and a greater likelihood of malnutrition,” she continued. “In such circumstances, humanitarian assistance needs to be stepped up, rather than down.”
UN launches ‘All In’ initiative to end adolescent AIDS

17 February - In the fight against HIV/AIDS, progress for adolescents has fallen behind, world leaders gathered at a United Nations meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, stressed today, as they launched a global initiative that aims to end the second leading cause of death among young people worldwide.

While major advances have been made in almost every area of the response to the human immunodeficiency virus, just one in four children and adolescents under the age of 15 have access to life-saving treatment. And deaths are declining in all age groups, except among 10-19 year olds, according to the UN.

“Children and young people should be the first to benefit from the progress we have made in ending the epidemic, not the last,” said UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Anthony Lake at the launch of a new platform for action to drive better results for adolescents by encouraging changes in policy and engaging young people in the effort.

The ‘All In’ initiative, a partnership between UNAIDS [Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS] and UNICEF, aims to reach adolescents with HIV services designed for their specific needs and to fast-track progress to advance global efforts to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

“We need to reach the adolescents we are missing and engage all young people in the effort to end adolescent AIDS. In fact, we cannot achieve the goal of an AIDS-free generation without them,” Mr. Lake stressed. More than 200 young advocates and leaders from adolescent and youth movements were present at launch of ‘All In’ in Nairobi today.

New HIV infections among adolescents are not declining as quickly as among other age groups. Adolescent girls are most affected. In South Africa, for example, more than 860 girls became infected with HIV every week in 2013, compared to 170 boys.

“HIV is the leading cause of death among adolescents in Africa and young women are most affected. This is a moral injustice. I am calling on young people to lead the ‘All In’ movement, alongside the United Nations, public and private partners, and countries themselves, to end the adolescent AIDS epidemic,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS.

This is also a pressing issue in East Asia and the Pacific. Thailand, for example, is facing a new rise in HIV cases, especially among young people, with 70% of all sexually transmitted infections (STI) cases occurring in the 15-24 age group. New data released in 2014 showed infections have risen among groups of at-risk young people, namely those involved in sex work, those injecting drugs, and young men having unprotected sex with men.

UNICEF Thailand used this data to talk to the government about reducing the age of consent for HIV tests to below 18, providing training for health workers on working with at-risk young people, and expanding HIV education in schools. In December 2014, the official guidance on HIV tests was changed in line with these recommendations.

Meanwhile, UNAIDS has set new Fast-Track Targets to be achieved by 2020 for adolescents that include reducing new HIV infections by at least 75%, reducing AIDS-related deaths by 65% and achieving zero discrimination. Achieving these targets would put the world on track towards ending adolescent AIDS by 2030 and ending the global AIDS epidemic as a public health threat.

Most of the 2.1 million adolescents living with HIV in 2013 became infected at least 10 years ago, when their mothers were pregnant, during delivery or in the first months of life – at a time when antiretroviral medicines that can greatly reduce the possibility of HIV transmission were not available. Many were never diagnosed, fell out of treatment and care programmes.
As Kyoto Protocol turns 10, UN says 'first critical step' must trigger new 2015 emissions-curbing deal

16 February - As momentum builds towards negotiations in Paris next year on a universal climate agreement, the United Nations announced today that early analysis shows that countries with targets under the landmark Kyoto Protocol – the world's first emission reduction treaty – have collectively exceeded their original ambition.

According to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), those countries who took on targets under the treaty have reduced their emissions by over 20 per cent – well in excess of the 5 per cent target they aimed to meet.

The achievement, which comes as the world today marks the 10th anniversary of the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, underlines what can be achieved via international cooperative action.

The news also comes as countries meeting in Geneva last week produced negotiating text for a successor climate change agreement that is expected to be approved later this year in Paris – the next key chapter in humanity's quest to chart a defining path to keep the world and its people under a 2 degree C temperature rise.

Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC said: “The Kyoto Protocol was a remarkable achievement in many ways. It not only underscored the scientific reality that greenhouse gas emissions need to fall. But it also put in place pioneering concepts, flexible options, practical solutions and procedures for accountability that we often take for granted today”.

Continuing, Ms. Figueres said she is convinced that without the treaty and its various mechanisms “we would not be as far forward as we are today in respect to, for example, the growing penetration of renewable energies.” The Kyoto Protocol's vision also helped spawn new and innovative initiatives like supporting developing countries to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, she added.

“The Kyoto Protocol was the first critical step – today we must take further and more far reaching action towards a truly sustainable future for seven billion, rising to over nine billion, people. Despite our best efforts, greenhouse gases continue to rise, threatening sustainable development and putting millions if not billions of people at risk over the coming decades, “said Ms. Figueres.

As such, the Paris agreement of December 2015 would bring all nations into common cause in support of men, women and children everywhere.

“It needs to be a long term, paradigm shift that reflects today's scientific reality – one that speaks to the urgency of swiftly peaking global greenhouse gas emissions, triggering a deep de-carbonization of the global economy and achieving climate neutrality in the second half of the century,” she added.

The Protocol, an international agreement under the UNFCCC, was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997 and entered into force on 16 February 2005.

During its first commitment period, from 2008 to 2012, 37 industrialized countries and the European Community committed to take a leading role in climate action by reducing their emissions to an average of just over five percent against 1990 levels.

The UNFCCC secretariat is expected to complete final accounting for the first phase later this year or early next year.

“Paris will not solve climate change at a pen stroke. But similarly it must trigger a world-wide over-achievement and a clear
sense of direction that can restore the natural balance of emissions on planet Earth,” said Ms. Figueres.

**UN rights chief requests 'one time only' deferral of key report on Sri Lanka conflict**

16 February - At the request of the top United Nations rights official, the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council today agreed to temporarily hold off its consideration of a long-awaited report into alleged rights violations during the conflict in Sri Lanka for six months, until September 2015.

Explaining his “difficult decision,” Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a press release issued by his Office that the deferral of the report was “for one time only,” and guaranteed that the report would be published by September.

His request for deferral was granted by the Council on Monday afternoon.

“There should be no misunderstanding,” Mr. Zeid said. “I give my personal, absolute and unshakable commitment that the report will be published by September.”

He said that there are good arguments for sticking to the original timetable, and there are also strong arguments for deferring the report’s consideration a bit longer, given the changing context in Sri Lanka, and the possibility that important new information may emerge which will strengthen the report.”

In addition, the High Commissioner said he has received clear commitments from the new Government of Sri Lanka indicating it is prepared to cooperate with my Office on a whole range of important human rights issues – which the previous Government had absolutely refused to do – and I need to engage with them to ensure those commitments translate into reality.”

Mr. Zeid noted that the three distinguished experts, appointed by his predecessor Navi Pillay to advise the investigation, had informed him that, in their unanimous view, a one-off temporary deferral would be the best option to allow space for the new Government to show its willingness to cooperate on human rights issues.

“Taking all this into account, I have therefore decided, on balance, to request more time to allow for a stronger and more comprehensive report,” he said, underscoring that he is acutely aware that many victims of human rights violations in Sri Lanka, including those who bravely came forward to provide information to the inquiry team, might see the deferral as the first step towards shelving, or diluting, a report they long feared they would never see.

“I fully understand those fears and deep anxieties, given the history of failed or obstructed domestic human rights inquiries in Sri Lanka, and the importance of this international investigation being carried out by my team at the UN Human Rights Office.”

Mr. Zeid gave his personal, absolute and unshakable commitment that the report will be published by September.

“Like my predecessors, I believe that one of the most important duties of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is to act as a strong voice on behalf of victims. I want this report to have the maximum possible impact in ensuring a genuine and credible process of accountability and reconciliation in which the rights of victims to truth, justice and reparations are finally respected,” he declared.

In March 2014, the 47-member UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution which requested the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) “to undertake a comprehensive investigation into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes by both parties in Sri Lanka during the period covered by Sri Lanka's Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission” which examined the last years of the armed conflict.”

The Council requested OHCHR to establish the facts and circumstances of such alleged violations, and of the crimes
perpetrated, with a view to avoiding impunity and ensuring accountability,” with assistance from relevant experts. An expert panel was set up in late June and OHCHR was to present a comprehensive report on its findings in March 2015.

Security Council, Ban condemn ISIL murder of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya

An estimated 400,000 people are displaced across Libya, including this man at a site near the capital, Tripoli. Photo: UNHCR/L. Dobbs

16 February - Strongly condemning the killing of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya by an affiliate of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations Security Council deplored the targeting of persons based on religious affiliation, while also urging Libyan parties to press ahead with their political dialogue.

In a statement issued to the press late yesterday in New York, the Security Council strongly condemned the “heinous and cowardly” apparent murder of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians by an ISIL-affiliate in Libya.

“This crime once again demonstrates the brutality of ISIL, which is responsible for thousands of crimes and abuses against people from all faiths, ethnicities and nationalities, and without regard to any basic value of humanity.” Council members declared in their statement, reiterating their strong condemnation of the persecution of individuals and entire communities on the basis of their religion or belief.

The strong pronouncements from the UN follow yesterday’s reported by ISIL of a video reportedly depicting hostages – believed to be Christian Coptic laborers from Egypt abducted from the Libyan city of Sirt – being led to a beach where they were then killed by assailants wielding knives.

Expressing deep sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims, to the Government of Egypt, as well as to the families of all victims of ISIL, the Security Council in its statement stressed again that ISIL must be defeated “and that the intolerance, violence and hatred it espouses must be stamped out.”

The members of the Council further emphasized that such “continued acts of barbarism perpetrated” by ISIL do not intimidate them but rather stiffen their resolve that there has to be a common effort amongst Governments and institutions, including those in the region most affected, “to counter ISIL, Ansar Al Sharia entities…and all other…entities associated with Al-Qaida,” as the Council resolved in its resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2199 (2015), adopted just last week.

Demanding the immediate, safe and unconditional release of all those who are kept hostage by ISIL, Ansar Al Sharia entities, and all other Al-Qaida associates, the Council underlined the need to bring perpetrators of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice and urged all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with Libya, Egypt and all other relevant authorities in this regard.

For his part, the Secretary-General also condemned the latest killing perpetrated by ISIL, which he referred to by Da'esh, the Arabic acronym for the group. In a statement issued today by his spokesperson, he deplored the targeting of people on account of their religious affiliation.

“The Secretary-General expresses his condolences to the families of those who lost their lives as a result of this barbaric act and to the Government of Egypt,” the statement said.

Mr. Ban reaffirmed that the ongoing dialogue in Libya “is the best chance to help the country overcome its current crisis. Only through dialogue can Libyans build a State and institutions that are able to confront terrorism,” concluded the statement concluded.

In their statement, the members of the Security Council reaffirmed their full support for Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Bernardino León, who is mediating those talks, two earlier round of which were hosted by the UN Office at Geneva and which just last week moved to Libya.
Amid reports of fighting in eastern Ukraine, Ban urges all parties to abide by cease-fire

16 February - With Ukraine cease-fire 'largely holding', United Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has expressed serious concern at reports of continued instances of hostilities including in Debaltseve and reiterated his call for all parties to abide by the cease-fire without exception.

In a statement issued late yesterday evening by his spokesperson in New York, Mr. Ban welcomed the start of a cease-fire in eastern Ukraine as agreed on 12 February under the package of measures for implementation of the Minsk accords.

“The Secretary-General notes that the cease-fire appears to be largely holding, giving a desperately needed respite to civilians trapped in the area and contributing to a swift and peaceful resolution of the conflict,” the statement stressed.

However, it goes on to note the UN chief's “serious concern” over reports of continued instances of hostilities including in Debaltseve and reiterates his call for all parties to abide by the cease-fire “without exception.”

“The Secretary-General reminds all of the significance of the cease-fire, which forms the basis for the broader implementation of the Minsk accords and to restore peace and stability to Ukraine,” the statement concludes.

This past Thursday, Mr. Ban commended the perseverance of the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany, negotiating in Belarus, to bring the conflict in Ukraine to an end, resulting in the signing of a package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk accords of September 2014. The talks resulted in a ceasefire and, reportedly, a peace roadmap towards ending the Ukraine conflict.

The Ukraine crisis began to deepen in late February 2014 when it evolved from an initial internal political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country. It later reached full-scale conflict in the east. Despite an earlier Minsk cease-fire, the situation in Ukraine has since continuously deteriorated, with serious consequences for the country's unity, territorial integrity and stability.

Yemen: Security Council demands Houthi militias withdraw from capital, join political talks

15 February - Demanding that secessionist Houthi militias in Yemen "immediately and unconditionally" withdraw from Government and security institutions, the Security Council this evening called on all Yemeni parties to engage in good faith in the United Nations-brokered political talks being led by Special Adviser Jamal Benomar.

Unanimously adopting a new resolution in a rare Sunday evening session, the Security Council expressed alarm at the acts of violence committed by the Houthis and their supporters, which have undermined the political transition process in Yemen, and jeopardized the country's stability and unity, demanding that all Yemeni "parties cease all armed hostilities against the people and the legitimate authorities of Yemen.”

The Council's action comes just days after Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned in a special briefing to the 15-member body that; “Yemen is collapsing before our eyes. We cannot stand by and watch.” Mr. Ban reminded the international community of its “solemn obligation” under the UN Charter to “do everything possible to help Yemen step back from the brink and get the political process back on track.”
Acting on a Jordan and United Kingdom-led text, the Security Council “deplored the unilateral actions taken by the Houthis to dissolve parliament and take over Yemen's Government institutions,” and reiterated its call for all Yemeni parties to adhere to resolving differences through dialogue and consultation, reject acts of violence to achieve political goals, and refrain from provocation to undermine the political transition.

The Council further demanded that Houthis withdraw their forces from Government institutions, including in the capital, Sana'a, and normalize the security situation in the capital and other provinces, as well as safely release President Hadi, Prime Minister Bahah, members of the Cabinet and all individuals under house arrest or arbitrarily detained.

Supporting the efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in assisting the political transition in Yemen, the Security Council urged all parties to agree upon and announce publicly dates for completing the constitutional consultation process, to hold a referendum on the constitution, and to conduct elections under the new electoral law pursuant to the new constitution.

Despite the formation of a new Government in November 2014 aimed at ending a period of political turbulence and bringing about a full transition towards democracy, Yemen continues to be plagued by violence and mass political demonstrations.

In recent weeks, the Secretary-General has voiced serious concern about developments following the abduction by the opposition group Ansarallah of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi’s chief of staff and the resignation of the President and Prime Minister amid a takeover of the capital, Sana’a by Houthi militants. This followed a steady deterioration since the beginning of the year as Government forces clashed with militant groups throughout the capital.

In his briefing to the Council last week, the UN chief also warned that “widespread and lethal” attacks by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and escalating hostilities between AQAP and the Houthis have pushed the country to the edge of civil war. These developments, coupled with a burgeoning humanitarian crisis which has enveloped an “astounding” 61 per cent of the population, now threaten regional and international peace and security, Mr. Ban added.

UN Special Adviser Benomar, who has continued to facilitate negotiations with all national stakeholders despite very difficult operational circumstances, also at that briefing, cautioned the Council that Yemen stood at a “crossroads.”

“Either the country will descend into civil war and disintegration, or the country will find a way to put the transition back on track,” he declared. “This largely depends on the political will of Yemeni leaders. They all bear responsibility for the current state of affairs, as well as responsibility for finding a way to pull the country from the brink.

Condemning Copenhagen attacks, Ban urges 'strong stand' for tolerance, end to discrimination

15 February - Strongly condemning this weekend's attacks at a freedom of expression event near a synagogue in Copenhagen, Denmark, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today stressed that there is no justification for attacks against civilians and reaffirmed the need for the world “stand strong” for tolerance and free expression.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York, Mr. Ban strongly condemned the shooting attacks in Copenhagen, which took place on 14 and 15 February 2015, respectively.

According to press reports, the first of two shootings occurred Saturday evening when a gunman attacked a cultural center during a discussion on free expression. The gunman later fired shots near a synagogue before he was reportedly tracked down and killed by police. In all, two civilians reportedly died in the attacks Saturday and earlier today. Five police officers were wounded, according to Danish authorities.

In his statement, the Secretary-General says that his thoughts are with the victims and their families, and that the UN stands in solidarity with the people and authorities of Denmark.
“The Secretary-General reaffirms that there is no justification for attacks against civilians and reiterates the need to stand strong for freedom of expression and tolerance,” the statement goes on to say and emphasizes that there is no space for anti-Semitism or any form of racial, ethnic or religious discrimination in today’s world.

Senior UN, European Union relief officials urge protection for vulnerable people in Central African Republic

15 February - Senior UN, European Union relief officials urge protection for vulnerable people in Central African Republic

While a major scaling up of humanitarian action over the past year meant that “the worst has been avoided” in Central African Republic, senior United Nations and European Union relief officials in the region today stressed that needs are still extremely high and much remains to be done to ease the “appalling” suffering faced by the country’s people.

In a press release issued in Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic (CAR), the joint high-level mission drew attention to the human suffering and called for greater access to and better protection of vulnerable communities amid what has transformed into a deeply complex and increasingly multi-layered crisis.

Participating in the five day mission were Deputy UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Kyung-wha Kang, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs), Chaloka Beyani, and the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) Director of Operations, Jean-Louis de Brouwer.

The officials saw for themselves the “appalling” living conditions of people directly affected by the current crisis during their visits to Bambari, Yaloke, Mpoko and PK5 in Bangui, and acknowledged that while much has changed since conflict erupted more than a year ago amid a significant scaling up of humanitarian action, the need for assistance remains extremely high.

More than two years of civil war and sectarian violence have displaced thousands of people in the CAR. Some 190,000 have sought asylum across the borders amid continuing violent clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka alliance and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian. Meanwhile, more than 36,000 people remain trapped in enclaves across the landlocked country, hoping to find asylum in neighbouring States.

More than 2.7 million Central Africans require one form or another of external help to survive. Some 500,000 are still displaced. Those that remain trapped by the continued violence are in an ever more precarious and desperate situation. The crisis has grown in complexity and, among other things, armed groups are fragmenting into numerous bands resulting in widespread banditry.

The situation of vulnerable civilians becomes more intractable and subject to rumours and political manipulation that exacerbate violence. “Improved and reliable communication with all communities is key in this situation of deep fear and mistrust,” asserted Ms. Kan, who is also the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

She went on to express deep concern for the fate of the many pockets of minorities and displaced civilians whose return to a normal and dignified life is impeded by this growing complexity. For the IDPs that remain in the Mpoko site at Bangui's airport, humanitarians are committed to working with authorities to find alternative solutions based on their informed and voluntary decisions.

For Muslim minorities confined in clearly delimited neighborhoods in Bangui and other towns such as Berberati, engagement in the otherwise laudable efforts of popular consultations in the Bangui Forum seems remote and reinsertion in the social and economic fabric of the country is only still a very distant proposition. At the same time, for nomadic Fulani cattle herders trapped by the conflict in such places as Yaloke, their very way of life is threatened as they languish in appalling conditions in enclaves.
“All these groups might face different long term challenges to regaining a sense of normality but they do share one common immediate constrain: the paralyzing fear of insecurity, which stops them from returning to their neighborhoods, reinvest in their economic activities or embark on their traditional migratory journeys,” said Ms. Kang. Attacks and exactions against civilians are rife, including sexual gender based violence and forced enrollment of children in armed groups.

The team stressed that such vulnerable groups require immediate protection. And while, it is the primary responsibility of the Transitional authorities to protect the population, relief partners can still do more in terms of identifying the most vulnerable and supporting local and religious authorities and civil society in providing adequate services and protection, in particular to women and children.

National police and Gendarmerie, with the support of international forces must provide more effective security in more parts of the country. But chiefly, violence and fighting must stop. In that regard, Ms. Kang called on all armed groups to immediately stop attacking and preying on civilian. “Only when peace and security returns to all corners of CAR will people feel empowered to reinvest in their lives,” she added.

The mission noted that the need to promote and restore social cohesion featured prominently in discussions with senior officials from the Transitional Authority, religious and community leaders as well as displaced people. An indispensable component to restore trust across sectarian and ethnics divides and address grievances is equality of rights.

For his part, Mr. Beyani stressed that “all Central Africans must enjoy the same rights, including freedom of movement for all. This applies to all displaced populations too. No one should be stopped from moving within the country, to cross borders on their way out or back in. People have the choice to choose solutions best suited to their needs and situation and their choices must be supported and respected”.

As for humanitarian action, ECHO's Jean-Louis de Brouwer reiterated that aid is delivered on the basis of needs, regardless of religious, political or ethnic affiliations. “Humanitarian organizations are here to help everyone and anyone who needs assistance. In so doing, humanitarian workers take great risks. Ensuring access to population in need and safeguarding humanitarian space is therefore essential to preserve the ability of aid groups to operate independently”.

**Ten years after Hariri assassination, Ban reasserts UN support for Lebanon**

14 February - On the tenth anniversary of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 21 others who lost their lives on that day, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon renewed his condolences to the families of the victims of this terrorist attack and pledged the Organization's commitment to the country and its people.

“A decade on, the message remains that impunity will not be tolerated,” said Mr. Ban in a statement issued by his spokesperson earlier today, which underscored the Organization's commitment to supporting the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, with the continued support and cooperation of the Lebanese Government.

The statement went on to reiterate the long standing commitment of the UN to the people of Lebanon on this occasion. “As Lebanon faces renewed challenges, the United Nations continues to work with the Government…alongside all Lebanese partners, to support the country in its efforts to strengthen stability and security, in line with relevant resolutions of the Security Council.”

The Hague-based Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which officially began its work in 2009, is mandated to hold trials for those accused of carrying out the 14 February 2005 bombing near the St. George Hotel in downtown Beirut that killed 23 people, including Mr. Hariri, and injured many others. The blast was so powerful that it left a crater at least 10-metres wide and two metres deep on the street, according to the Tribunal.

Following a series of other killings and bombings in Lebanon, the Lebanese Government requested that the UN create a
tribunal of "international character." The UN Security Council acknowledged the request on 15 December 2005 in its resolution 1644.

The UN and the Lebanese Government signed an agreement for the Special Tribunal on 23 January 2007 and the court opened on 1 March 2009 in Leidchendam, near The Hague, the Netherlands. The also court has offices in Beirut and operates as an independent judicial organization, not a UN court.

**Security Council condemns Boko Haram attacks as deadly violence spreads to Nigeria's neighbours**

14 February - The United Nations Security Council has condemned “in the strongest terms” the continued escalation of attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram terrorists, including deadly attacks during the past week which took the lives of many civilians in Chad, Cameroon and Niger.

In a statement issued to the press late yesterday evening, the Council deplored the ongoing escalation of Boko Haram violence, which has spread beyond northern Nigeria, where the group has perpetrated a raft of heinous crimes against civilians.

Council members cited attacks on 13 February in Ngouboua, Chad, against civilians, which killed many persons including the local traditional leader and injured several others, as well as an 8 February attack in Kerawa, Cameroon, and February 6-8 attacks in Diffa, Niger.

In its statement, the Council extended its condolences to the families of the victims and its sympathy to all those injured in these heinous attacks, as well as to the peoples and the Governments of the Republics of Chad, Cameroon and Niger.

“The members of the Security Council reaffirm that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including the actions of Boko Haram, constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security,” said the statement, stressing that such acts are “criminal and unjustifiable,” regardless of their motivation.

Council members also reiterated their determination to combat all forms of terrorism, in accordance with its responsibilities under the UN Charter, and underlined the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of acts of terrorism to justice.

Finally, the Council reminded States that they must ensure that measures taken to combat terrorism comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law.

**UN officials deplore ‘horrendous’ murder of woman in Turkey**

17 February - Violence against women and girls is a grave violation of human rights and can only be put to an end by addressing its root causes, two UN officials declared today as they condemned the attempted rape and brutal murder of a young Turkish woman which has sparked widespread protests throughout the country.

In a joint statement released earlier today, UN Women Representative to Turkey, Ingibjorg Gisladottir, and UNFPA Representative for Turkey, Zahidul Huque, deplored the “horrendous murder” of 20-year old student Özgecan Aslan, affirming that only by fighting gender inequality and discrimination against women could such violence be prevented.

“We recognize the considerable progress Turkey has made with regard to the legislation to combat violence against women and commend the Turkish Government for its leadership in promoting the Istanbul Convention, including by being the first government to sign it,” stated the two UN officials.
“It is nonetheless concerning that notwithstanding the progress in Turkish legislation and institutional structuring, recent data on violence against women shows insignificant improvement since 2008 and violence against women is still pervasive with two out of every five women in Turkey exposed to sexual and physical violence.”

According to reports, Ms. Aslan was traveling on a bus in the eastern Turkish city of Mersin when a man attempted to sexually assault her. Ms. Aslan defended herself with pepper-spray but the assailant subsequently stabbed her and beat her to death with an iron bar. The incident has unleashed a torrent of debate on social media and prompted many women across Turkey to voice their own experiences of sexual harassment.

In their statement, the two UN officials underscored the important role that men and boys can play in society in fighting all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, adding that “each and every one of us can help to challenge gender stereotypes, harmful traditional practices and discrimination against women.”

Both UN Women and UNFPA are accelerating their messaging against violence against women as the UN and international community hurtle towards the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action – the defining framework for change which brought global visibility to gender equality issues.

In addition, the Platform for Action calls for better services for women survivors of violence and for effective legislation that protects women from domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and rape, and for the effective persecution and punishment of the perpetrators.

“Violence against women has serious consequences for the victims but it also negatively affects families, the community and the country at large,” Ms. Gisladottir and Mr. Huque continued. “Preventing violence against women can save lives and prevent human suffering.”

Amid rising insecurity in Cameroon, senior UN relief official calls for ‘beefed up’ civilian protection

17 February - Concluding a seven-day visit to Central Africa, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs today called international support ‘pivotal’ in preventing further destabilization of the region, particularly Cameroon, where more than two million people are already in need of aid.

“Efforts to ensure security and provide protection to civilians must be beefed up, and aid organizations must be able to secure greater access to populations in need of assistance,” Ms. Kyung-wha Kang reiterated yesterday as the first Summit of Heads of States and Governments of the Economic Community of Central African States convened on regional security in Cameroon’s capital of Yaoundé.

In a statement released on the heels of her travels throughout the country visiting refugee camps and meeting with displaced people, Ms. Kang warned that Cameroon is facing an increasingly complex and multifaceted humanitarian situation: a refugee influx in the east from the conflict in Central African Republic (CAR), a surge of displacements in the northern region due to Boko Haram attacks, repeated cycles of droughts and floods, malnutrition and recurrent epidemics.

Ms. Kang, who is also UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, expressed deep concern about the growing impact of attacks by Boko Haram in neighbouring Nigeria and Cameroon which has prompted some 40,000 Nigerians to seek refuge in Cameroon and displacing tens of thousands of Cameroonians. “I am particularly concerned by reports of attacks on villages, kidnapping of civilians, recruitment of young men and indoctrination of children,” she said.

Given these developments, the humanitarian appeal for Cameroon has more than doubled in a year: the 2015 Strategic Response Plan seeks $264 million compared to $126 million in 2014.

Insecurity has also halted economic activity and harvesting in many areas in the far northern region and is impeding humanitarians from accessing the affected people.
During her visit in the country last week, Ms. Kang, travelled to eastern Cameroon, on the border with CAR, where more than 150,000 Central Africans have sought refuge from the violence. She visited the Gado refugee camp, where the majority of refugees are women and children and heard testimonies about the horrors of their months-long journey in the bush to escape violence. Many died of exhaustion, disease or at the hands of armed groups, she recalled.

Earlier in her trip, Ms. Kang also visited several pockets inside CAR with internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were in dire need and unwilling to go back home unless security was assured. She stressed that for Central African IDPs and refugees to feel safe returning to their areas of origin, violence must stop and discrimination against minorities and accountability for violations need to be addressed.

Ms. Kang also called for grass-roots mechanisms to foster reconciliation and mend the sectarian divide that has deepened by the armed conflict that broke out in CAR in December 2013. She reiterated that “enabling women to play a leadership role in their communities is essential to foster reconciliation, recovery and peace.”

Cameroon is also affected by the ongoing food security crisis in the Sahel region which has left more than a million people in need of life-saving food and nutritional assistance. The UN and partners recently launched the Sahel humanitarian appeal for 2015. The appeal is part of a regional multi-year strategy to respond to the chronic challenges in the region.

In Yaoundé, Ms. Kang met with representatives of UN and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners as well as donor representatives, emphasizing that investing in areas such as education and youth employment could contribute to reducing the impact of Boko Haram.