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**New UN report highlights ‘terrifying’ impact of Ebola on nine million children**

17 March - Some nine million children have seen “death and suffering beyond their comprehension,” and protecting them and their communities is critical in the fight against Ebola in West Africa, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said in a report released today.

UNICEF said the report, which was released in the Senegalese capital of Dakar, Geneva, and New York, “looks at the dramatic impact Ebola has had on children as it hit some of the most vulnerable communities in some of the world's most vulnerable countries.”

Of the more than 24,000 people infected, some 5,000 are children, while more than 16,000 children have lost one or both parents or their primary caregiver, according to UNICEF.

“For many of the nine million children living in affected areas, Ebola has been terrifying,” the agency said. “These children have seen death and suffering beyond their comprehension.”

The report also points to the central role communities are playing in the response and shows encouraging trends in safe behaviours.

“In Liberia, for example, a survey indicates that 72 per cent of people believe anyone with Ebola symptoms will get better care at a treatment centre, which is significant because many used to keep Ebola victims at home, spreading infection in the community,” according to the agency.
The report’s release comes days after the UN World Health Organization (WHO) said Liberia reported no new confirmed cases for the second consecutive week from the disease that has affected more than 24,000 people with more than 10,000 deaths.

“The outbreak will not be over until there are zero cases, and every single contact has been traced and monitored. We cannot afford to let our guard down,” Barbara Bentein, UNICEF’s Global Emergency Coordinator for Ebola, said in a press release.

“At the same time, basic services need to be re-established safely and responsibly, using the assets of the response,” she added.

UNICEF, which helped minimize the risk of Ebola infections when schools reopened following months of closures that left 5 million children out of school, noted that investing in improving health care systems in Ebola-affected countries will help tackle other diseases such as measles, pneumonia and diarrhoea, which take a heavy toll on children.

**Citing need to break ‘cycle of impunity,’ UN panel urges referral of Syria to ICC**

17 March - A culture of impunity continues to flourish inside Syria amid a conflict that has generated over four million refugees and hundreds of thousands of dead, the head of a United Nations-mandated Commission of Inquiry said today, urging the international community to step up efforts in bringing the four-year-long war to a close.

Addressing the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro warned that the Syrian civil war had intensified in its destructive scale as combatants used aerial and ground weapons “indiscriminately and disproportionately” and committed an alarming number of human rights violations.

The use of barrel bombs, the proliferation of small arms, the introduction of extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) into the fighting, and the surge in sexual violence has precipitated the country’s plunge into “darkness,” Mr. Pinheiro said, as he presented the Commission’s report.

“The way this war has been fought, in urban areas with devastating explosive weapons, raises many questions,” he continued. “The arming and funding of the warring parties, compounded by the flow of foreign fighters, fuel the illusion that military victory is possible. Impunity emboldens perpetrators of atrocities and weapons empower them.”

Mandated by the Council to investigate and record all violations of international human rights law, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria is also tasked with investigating allegations of crimes against humanity and war crimes, with its mandate recently expanded to include “investigations of all massacres.”

The Commission’s latest report – released last month – charts the major trends and patterns of abuses perpetrated in the country from March 2011 to January 2015, stressing the need for urgent international action, particularly by States with influence over the warring parties, to find a political solution to the conflict in order to “stop grave violations of human rights and to break the intractable cycle of impunity.”

At the same time, Mr. Pinheiro reiterated the Commission’s dedication to “not only bringing forth the voice of victims but also to finding a path to justice for them” through a Security Council referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

“Our aim has always been to advocate for and to support an effective remedy for victims,” he declared. “A coordinated accountability strategy and the will to implement it effectively are desperately needed.”

In an interview with UN Radio, Mr. Pinheiro admitted that the lack of movement in sending the case of Syria to the ICC was “lamentable,” particularly as all parties in the ongoing conflict were “not at all respecting the needs and protection of the civilian population.” In addition, he explained, the Government of Syria continued to create “great difficulties” for the Commission’s work.
“We don’t take the side of the Government or of the different parties. Our only side is the centrality of the victims in the conflict. And it is exactly that that we are trying to do in all the now nine reports that we have presented to the Human Rights Council,” Mr. Pinheiro said.

In his address to the Council, he stated that as the Syrian war entered its fifth year, it had become evident that the conflict was “a chronicle of missed opportunities on the part of States with political influence and the broader international community.”

“This Human Rights Council must demand that the international community unite to bring about an urgent diplomatic solution capable of ending the violence and delivering perpetrators to justice.”

**Amid logistical challenges, UN focuses on priority needs for cyclone-hit Vanuatu**

**17 March** - In spite of logistical challenges facing the humanitarian response in Vanuatu, a nation that comprises over 80 islands, United Nations agencies continue to scale up their efforts to assist with priority needs including the provision of food, water and healthcare in the wake of the devastating cyclone that battered the country over the weekend.

A UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team arrived in the Pacific Ocean archipelago yesterday and began its work in supporting the Government of Vanuatu in coordinating the humanitarian response to Cyclone Pam.

“The communication infrastructure is in poor condition, causing difficulties in the humanitarian coordination. However, the Government is clearly in charge of the response and President Baldwin Lonsdale has asked for international assistance,” Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told a news conference in Geneva.

The World Food Programme (WFP) is working to support the response in all areas of its mandate, including emergency food assistance, logistics and telecommunications interventions.

“While there did not appear to be a need for the WFP to bring in large quantities of food assistance at present, WFP had been asked to provide logistics support for management of relief items, technical assistance in organising food distributions, and IT support,” spokesperson Elisabeth Byrs stated, adding that the agency has contingency stocks of High-Energy Biscuits on standby and ready to be airlifted into the country if necessary.

Ms. Byrs noted that the Government has requested satellite equipment to facilitate communication between the islands, as well as support to set up communications systems to coordinate the humanitarian response.

The UN International Telecommunication Union (ITU), for its part, said today it has dispatched emergency telecommunications equipment to Vanuatu following the devastation caused by the cyclone. At the request of the Government, ITU has sent 40 satellite phones, 10 Broadband Global Area Network terminals, and 35 solar panels to support relief coordination efforts.

Noting that over 80 per cent of the population in Vanuatu is engaged in agriculture, Ms. Byrs said that different assistance would be needed to support those who have suffered losses in the agricultural sector, which had been severely affected by the storm. This included destruction of the banana crop and most coconut trees, loss of vegetable and fruit crops, destruction of small livestock and fishing infrastructure, as well as loss of food and seed stocks.

Coconut plantations, which are the key agricultural commodity in the country, are likely to have been severely damaged, she added. Given the heavy reliance of communities on coconuts and coconut products, impact on livelihoods is likely to be long-lasting. Fishing is a key livelihood in coastal areas, and it might now have been disrupted due to severe winds resulting in loss of fishing boats and other assets.
Meanwhile, the country’s Ministry of Health today began a measles prevention campaign with support from UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

This is critically important given the low routine immunisation rates and a recent measles outbreak in early March, according to a news release on the campaign, the purpose of which is to prevent a measles epidemic in a population made doubly vulnerable by low immunisation coverage and the cyclone disaster.

UNICEF is also distributing health supplies for children and families affected by the cyclone, including basic health kits, oral rehydration salt sachets, zinc tablets, vitamin A capsules, and de-worming tablets. The agency has also donated tents, school backpacks with school supplies, recreation kits, hygiene kits, water tanks, soap for hand washing, collapsible water containers and water purification tables.

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Cyclone Pam – which also impacted the Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu – had been one of the most powerful cyclones to make landfall, with winds having been estimated to have reached 250 km/hr with gusts of 320 km/hr.

“Its maximum speed had been more than enough to lift an airplane when it had made a direct hit on the capital, Port Vila,” WMO’s Clare Nullis told reporters in Geneva.

She noted that the early warnings issued by WMO’s Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre in Fiji and by local meteorological services had indeed been accurate. “Without those warnings, the loss of life would have been much greater. Nonetheless, the intensity of the storm had been such that it had caused a lot of material damage.”

Darfur security, humanitarian situations ‘deteriorated significantly’ – UN peacekeeping chief

17 March - The security and humanitarian situations in the Darfur region of Sudan “deteriorated significantly” over the past year, the head of United Nations peacekeeping told the Security Council today, adding that there had also been no tangible progress toward resolving the conflict.

Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, presented two reports to the Council, including one specifically dedicated to implementation by the African Union-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) of new strategic priorities, which highlights progress made and difficulties encountered during the exercise.

“The current upsurge in Darfur, at least for now, is largely attributable to the ongoing Government of Sudan and the RSF [Rapid Support Forces – a counter-insurgency militia] military offensive,” he said, adding that it was not “directly linked with the forthcoming Sudanese general elections.”

He warned that events on the ground could change as election campaigns intensified, particularly in light of recent calls by Sheikh Musa Hilal, a prominent tribal leader in North Darfur, for an election boycott and disruption of the electoral process across Darfur. Also, if the threat did actualise, existing inter-tribal tensions may heighten as strict security measures and additional Government security forces were deployed, he added.

Describing the Government’s ‘Decisive Summer’ military offensive against non-signatory armed groups, he said the national army had significantly weakened and isolated the armed groups geographically, also causing “significant loss of lives and large-scale displacement.”

Around 450,000 people in total were displaced over 2014, as a result of violence, which Mr. Ladsous said was a higher volume in any single year since the peak of the conflict in 2004. At least 300,000 of those remain displaced, mostly in camps for internally displaced persons, with the total number of displaced persons in Darfur now totalling 2.5 million.
“This negative trend has continued most recently with the continuation of fighting between the Government and the armed groups,” he said, pointing to “at least 43,000 new displacements since the beginning of the year.”

At the same time as the situation on the ground was worsening, Mr. Ladsous said prospects for holding the National Dialogue between the Government and the opposition before the election were limited, with talks on Darfur breaking down and the Government implementing measures curtailing political freedom.

However, in February, the Berlin Declaration was signed, which called for the convening of an inclusive preparatory meeting at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa to revive the talks.

“The Berlin Declaration seems to demonstrate a certain consensus among the opposition to reengage in the National Dialogue,” he said.

Throughout 2014, the Joint Special Representative for Darfur urged rebels to participate in the peace process based on the Doha agreement and without preconditions. Direct negotiations took place in November but were suspended because the parties were too far apart, while UNAMID continued to provide sites and camps for displaced people and continued to support efforts to address the root causes of the conflict by engaging traditional chiefs, civil society and others.

Turning to the mission, Mr. Ladsous described the efforts taken to address the three main challenges to its mandate implementation, which were identified in last year’s strategic review, including improved cooperation with the Government in some areas, implementation of measures to improve the mission’s troops’ operational capabilities and effectiveness on the ground, and improvements to coordination and management structures.

“Nevertheless, some of the major challenges remain,” he said, listing the need to improve the mission’s reporting of incidents and analysis, its internal and external communications approach, and the recruitment of personnel to key posts.

“Despite strategic and operational-level improvements in coordination with the United Nations Country Team, further progress on establishing an effective Darfur-wide early warning and response system is required.”

Devastation in cyclone’s wake illustrates need for targeted disaster response, Pacific leaders say at UN conference

17 March - With reports slowly emerging about the damage wrought in Vanuatu, which suffered the brunt of Cyclone Pam that pummeled the South Pacific over the weekend, leaders from the region made a joint call today from a United Nations conference on disaster resilience for scaled-up storm recovery efforts, as well as durable partnerships that would help their countries strengthen capacities to deal with such extreme weather events.

Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands were also battered by the Category Five storm, and Aunese Makoi Simati, Tuvalu’s Ambassador to the United Nations told reporters in Sendai, Japan, where he is attending the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, that while the winds had begun to die down, the damage in his country’s northern islands, as well as Vanuatu, is immense.

“The word ‘vulnerable’ goes hand-in-hand with the words ‘small island,’” he said, expressing sympathy and solidarity with all the affected islands and neighboring atolls. Ambassador Simati said that when Pacific Islanders are asked ‘why can't people go to higher ground?’ ‘why can't people just move somewhere else?’, the reality is that they simply cannot.

“There is no high ground. Tuvalu is less than three metres above sea level. Our islands are flat…the highest building is only three stories. The islands are small, so ‘moving’ means just going to the other side,” he explained.

He noted somberly that in the wake of Cyclone Pam, which had inundated villages and destroyed cemeteries, “we feel that even the dead are calling for help” as island nations like Vanuatu and Tuvalu struggle to cope with and plan for natural
disasters, which are increasing in frequency, intensity and duration.

The aim of the Sendai Conference, which wraps up tomorrow, 18 March, is to update the landmark Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), itself crafted in the wake of the devastation of the Indian Ocean tsunami in January 2005. Climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, as well as the specific vulnerabilities faced by small island developing States, have emerged as key priorities during the discussions in Sendai.

On that point, Ambassador Simati noted the vast distances that must be covered to investigate the damages in remote islands in the wake of the cyclone. New Zealand and Australia are sending planes to survey the area, because it would take boats about two days to reach outlying islands.

“The issue of disaster risk reduction is very close to our hearts – from [Sendai] to Christchurch and the Pacific Islands, we are all in the most disaster-prone region on earth,” he said, and while international action plans such as the Samoa Pathway are in place, when disaster strikes, mobilizing help under severe resource constraints, with vast distances to cover and no telecommunications links, remains a deep challenge.

Faamoetauloa Tumaalii, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Samoa, echoed that sentiment, stressing that small island governments, especially in the South Pacific, need development partners to support projects to strengthen disaster resilience. Without such support, “it will take a long time to build these capacities.”

The priority is on finance, he said, noting that small island developing States need easy access to such UN-backed mechanisms as the Green Climate Fund. Indeed, he was echoing “loud calls” from the Pacific that there is too much red tape to gain access to such funds.

Another top priority is ensuring “sustainable development of small island States through genuine and durable partnerships,” as set out in the ‘Samoa Pathway’, as the outcome of the Third UN Conference on Small Island Developing States, adopted last year in Apia, Samoa, is informally known.

Picking up that thread, Ambassador Simati encouraged the international community to be flexible, stressing that while there are universally agreed frameworks, such mechanisms must address ground-level realities for small islands. Rather than operating by “remote control” when it came to dealing with countries like his, he said actions and strategies must take into account specific vulnerabilities.

“Our faith carries us through and we do what we can…with our families often carrying out the initial [disaster response],” but, he said, sea-level rise is real threat, the impact on food security is real, and affected countries need international assistance and partnership.

Noting that some countries had purchased land in other States, not only to counter the impacts of climate change but also to gain arable land for farming, Ambassador Simati said Tuvalu had not followed that path. “We don't want to give the signal that we are giving up on our country. We can't be called Tuvaluan if we live in another country.”

Tai Tura Associate Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of the Cook Islands said Government surpluses were devoted to disaster resilience. The Government also devoted resources to mitigate the risks of disaster posed to the tourism industry, which was the Cook Islands' main source of income. It had also devoted resources and legislation to protect its surrounding marine environment.
Nobel laureate calls for push to end ‘biggest crime against humanity’: child labour

17 March - Depriving children of their childhood and their freedom is “the biggest crime against humanity,” child rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Kailash Satyarthi said today during a visit to United Nations Headquarters in New York.

In an interview with the UN News Centre, Mr. Satyarthi welcomed the momentum gained in the struggle to eradicate child labour and child slavery since his awarding of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize, voicing optimism that the fight would ultimately be a successful one.

“The very first few hours following the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize in October brought so much attention to the world about the plight of the most exploited, most neglected children on the planet. That hadn’t happened in all my life,” he explained.

“Suddenly, the whole issue of child slavery, child labour, education for children, child violence, and things like that, appeared in the global discussion.”

Mr. Satyarthi, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with renowned activist Malala Yousafzai for their work in championing children’s rights around the world, cited a feeling of moral responsibility as propelling him to address the issue of children’s rights “at the next level.”

“All children are our children and we have to react,” he said. “I cannot wait because childhood cannot wait.”

“The denial of childhood in any form, the denial of freedom in any form, the denial of education, it is the biggest crime against humanity. The denial of these children’s dreams – nothing could be worse than that,” continued Mr. Satyarthi. “And when the children are taken away from the parents, taken away from the schools or even not allowed to go to school and put to work somewhere in mines, factories, streets and so on, is a blot on the face of humankind.”

According to the UN International Labour Organization (ILO), the number of children in child labour worldwide has declined significantly since 2000, from 246 million to 168 million, with more than half of them (an estimated 85 million) engaged in hazardous work such as mining.

Mr. Satyarthi attributed much of the successes on the ground to the cumulative impact and efforts of civil society organizations, governments, UN agencies, businesses and society as a whole. Compassionate consumers, he noted, also helped drive awareness and deliver the message that child labour is no longer acceptable.

Despite the successes on the ground, however, the Nobel laureate urged “a much bigger push,” warning that a “whole generation would be lost if we don’t act now.”

“I am very confident that we are going to be able to put an end to child slavery and child labour. And that is going to happen in my lifetime. So I am very optimistic about it,” he added. “We cannot call ourselves civilized if one single child is living in slavery anywhere in the world.”
Eighty countries adopt call to action at first UN conference on dementia

17 March - A two-day ministerial conference on dementia hosted by the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) ended in Geneva today with 80 countries calling for action to address “a tidal wave” of new cases of the disease projected to cost the world $1.2 trillion by 2050.

“You are starting a very important movement,” WHO’s Director-General, Dr. Margaret Chan, told a packed room of more than 400 delegates following the adoption of the Call for Action.

Saying it is “one of the major health challenges for our generation,” the Call for Action noted that dementia currently affects more than 47 million people worldwide, with more than 75 million people estimated to be living with dementia by 2030. The number is expected to triple by 2050.

Dr. Chan said the cost of dementia can bankrupt health systems “even in the richest countries,” referring to the worldwide cost of caring for patients with dementia climbing from some $607 billion in 2010 to an estimated $1.2 trillion in 2050.

“There is a tidal wave of dementia coming our way worldwide,” she stated. “We need to see greater investments in research to develop a cure, but also to improve the quality of life of people living with dementia and the support given to their caregivers.”

She welcomed the announcement by the United Kingdom that more than $100 million will be invested in a pioneering new global Dementia Discovery Fund. WHO said major pharmaceutical companies have committed in principle to investing in promising research efforts for dementia through the “innovative mechanism” that could bring about a breakthrough in treatment.

Eighty countries joined the two-day conference with experts from the research, clinical and advocacy communities discussing how, collectively, they could move forward action on dementia at the global level.

WHO said it committed to leading and coordinating efforts on dementia. It also pledged to establish a Global Dementia Observatory that will monitor disease prevalence and dementia care resources in Member States and track the establishment of national dementia policies and plans.

The agency said there was clear consensus on the need for coordinated efforts to track evolution of the disease burden, create policies to address the impact of dementia, and conduct research for treatment and improved, cost-effective care.

“We have been running behind the curve with dementia for a long time,” said Dr. Chan, “but several recent events tell us that we are catching up. We must weave these multiple new initiatives into a comprehensive plan that can work in all countries. Government commitment will be key.”

The Call for Action for people living with dementia, their caregivers, families and community included raising awareness of the condition and its risk factors, building capacity for timely diagnosis, commitment to good quality continuing care and services, caregiver support, workforce training, and research.
UN ‘disturbed’ at alleged rights abuses by politicians in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

17 March - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said today that it is deeply concerned about the prolonged political impasse in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and its human rights implications.

Spokesperson Cécile Pouilly told reporters in Geneva that OHCHR is “particularly disturbed” by the contents of recently published taped conversations that would seem to incriminate senior officials in a number of apparent human rights violations, including election fraud, harassment, interference with the judiciary and the mass media, as well as mass surveillance. It is also concerned about espionage accusations directed against the head of the largest opposition party.

“We call upon the authorities to launch a prompt, independent, thorough and impartial investigation into all allegations of wrongdoing, regardless of their source, and to ensure that the results are made public,” said Ms. Pouilly.

“We also urge the authorities to ensure accountability for any breach of the rule of law or human rights violation revealed by such an investigation. This would help reinforce public confidence in State institutions.”

She added that in the current uncertain political environment, guarantees of the independence of the judiciary were especially important, as was respect for the rule of law, freedom of the press and international standards of fair trial and due process.

OHCHR called on all parties to exercise restraint and to engage in a meaningful dialogue aimed at resolving the political crisis in a way that will ensure full respect for human rights.

UN agency begins relocation of 50,000 flood-affected refugees in Ethiopia

17 March - The United Nations refugee agency said today it has begun the relocation of more than 50,000 South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia from flood-prone areas ahead of the rainy season, which is expected to start in late April.

“The refugees are being moved from the Leitchuor and Nip Nip refugee camps in the Gambella region, western Ethiopia. Last year, in August, both camps were severely hit by flood waters during unusually heavy seasonal rains, causing the Baro river to burst its banks,” Karin de Gruijl, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told reporters in Geneva.

“The first group of 377 refugees left in a convoy of 11 vehicles, including buses, ambulance, a luggage truck and security escort,” she added.

The refugees received high energy biscuits and water as they boarded the buses for the 300-kilometer long journey, which takes about eight hours. A total of 51,316 refugees from flood-prone areas in the two camps will be relocated. The group from Nip Nip will be moved to the existing Pugnido camp, which currently hosts nearly 56,000 South Sudanese refugees.

An additional camp, Jewi, located some 18 kilometres from the regional capital Gambella was opened over the weekend. The new camp is now being developed to accommodate the larger group of refugees from Leitchuor and their transfer will start in early April this year.
UNHCR noted that finding land with the right conditions to set up another refugee camp has been a huge challenge, as several sites that had been identified immediately after last year’s rainy season were subsequently declared unsuitable.

“However, more land is still needed to accommodate new arrivals from South Sudan,” said Ms. de Gruijl.

Some two million people have been uprooted by the violence in South Sudan since December 2013. Nearly 1.5 million people are internally displaced inside the country and more than half a million fled across the border into neighbouring countries, many of them to Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is Africa’s largest refugee-hosting country with more than 670,000 refugees, mainly from Somalia, followed by South Sudan, Sudan and Eritrea. This includes more than 250,000 South Sudanese refugees in the Gambella region, of whom more than 194,000 have arrived since mid-December 2013.

**UN envoy welcomes lifting of house arrest of Yemeni leaders**

17 March - The United Nations Special Adviser on Yemen, Jamal Benomar, welcomed the lifting of the house arrest of the country’s Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and other Cabinet members as a “good gesture that may restore the missing confidence in the current political negotiations.”

“This step could help normalize the security and political situation in Yemen if complemented by the implementation of the remaining demands of the Security Council, and a genuine commitment to reaching a political solution to the current crisis,” Mr. Benomar said in a statement issued yesterday in the Yemeni capital, Sana’a.

Mr. Benomar expressed relief that the continuous outreach efforts eventually yielded positive results and ended one aspect of the “exceptional situation” in Yemen, namely placing the Prime Minister Khaled Bahah, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Alsaidi and other Cabinet members under house arrest.

“He considered the move a good gesture that may restore the missing confidence in the current political negotiations,” the statement said.

The envoy expressed hope that the released government ministers would actively resume their contribution to Yemen’s political life and to the success of the negotiations aimed at bringing the transitional process back on track and ending the serious crisis that threatens Yemen’s unity, stability and security.

He renewed his call to Yemenis to adhere to resolving their differences peacefully through dialogue and reject all acts of violence to achieve political goals and “reaffirmed that the UN-brokered negotiations represent a genuine opportunity to reach consensus on the issues that have derailed the transition, considering them a lifeline that may spare Yemen the scenario of civil unrest and disintegration.”

The Special Adviser also reaffirmed that he will spare no efforts with all Yemeni parties, especially the Houthis, so that they implement Security Council’s resolution 2201. That resolution calls for, among other things, the parties to engage in good faith in the UN-brokered negotiations, and for the Houthis to withdraw their forces from government institutions and normalize the security situation in the capital Sana’a and other provinces, and relinquish government and security institutions and state-owned media outlets.

The resolution also calls for the release of all individuals under house arrest or arbitrarily detained, for allowing all Yemenis to assemble peacefully without fear and refraining from all unilateral actions to undermine the political transition.
UN agency boosts food security efforts in countries affected by Syria crisis

17 March - The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has announced a scale-up in its support to Jordan and other countries in the Middle East affected by the humanitarian crisis in Syria that has entered its fifth year.

According to a statement from the Rome-based agency, FAO has signed an agreement with the Government of Jordan aimed at improving data analysis. In a meeting today with Jordan’s agriculture minister, Akef Alzoubi, FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva initiated three projects on food security, nutrition, and preventing the spread of animal diseases.

“Thanks to a $1.6 million grant from USAID’s [United States Agency for International Development] Food For Peace (FFP) programme, FAO will provide technical assistance to government institutions and other partners in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq to establish an inclusive food security information network that will enhance the understanding and analysis of food security issues in the region,” Mr. Graziano da Silva said in Amman.

According to the UN, more than four million people have fled Syria, the vast majority becoming refugees in neighbouring countries. Prior to the Syrian conflict, the wider region but particularly Syria, Lebanon and Iraq were already facing significant challenges in fighting hunger.

Four years on, the crisis has raised additional concerns for neighbouring countries to reach development goals from access to water and sanitation to child and maternal mortality. Most affected by the Syrian crisis are Jordanian households and Syrian refugees in northern Jordan.

By improving analysis and data sharing between UN agencies and governments, the new network will allow better-informed interventions for vulnerable populations and ensure that the limited resources are applied where they are needed most.

“Resources for responding to the Syria crisis are limited in relation to the needs, so it’s crucial for UN agencies and partners to strategically target their assistance, taking into account the severity, scale and underlying causes of vulnerability,” said FAO’s Jordan Representative Nasredin Hag Elamin.

“Having timely food security information is essential to guide this effort and will help relief and resilience agencies make sound decisions on the types of actions needed to support the affected Syrian population and neighbouring countries that host refugees,” he added.

In efforts to contain the spread of animal diseases across borders, FAO and Jordan have agreed to support local communities and veterinary laboratories in increasing early detection and disease control, while also assessing the socio-economic impact of these diseases on pastoralist communities across Jordan.

The collapse of public veterinary services in Syria has posed additional threats as an increased number of animals have crossed into neighbouring countries and potentially spreading animal diseases.
Citing insufficient progress, UN official urges more rapid change for gender equality

17 March - A senior United Nations official today stressed the need for more rapid advancements on gender equality, saying the pace of change since the 1995 World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, on many issues has not been sufficient and major disparities between genders remain.

Speaking at an event held on the margins of the current session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, said the world had witnessed “numerous improvements” in women’s lives in fields such as employment and education since Beijing but equality was still elusive.

“No sector or country has met the standards laid out in Beijing, where gender equality is a reality,” she said. “While we should rejoice at the progress made when we look back and see where we are at present, we do have to convey a strong message … that we need to take every step, every measure, every law, every programme in order to push the pace and push the envelope on this issue.

“Otherwise, we are going to take almost another century to get to Planet 50:50 by 2030. This is absolutely not acceptable.”

She called for evaluation of the progress achieved but also of the gaps, with a focus on what the challenges have been and on how to get to Planet 50:50 by 2030.

The Beijing Platform for Action, she noted, mandated the full participation of women in the public, private and governmental realms.

“It also affirms that the equal and active participation of women is fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace,” she said, going on to note the demands it made of the UN system as well.

She said responsibility for implementing the Platform lay at the highest level and she pointed to the proven importance of the role of senior leaders in catalysing and bringing about change, highlighting Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as a good example of a leader who had stood behind positive change.

Even within the UN system, the situation of women faced significant challenges and had not achieved the aims of the Beijing Platform, noted Ms. Puri.

“Good progress but not enough,” she said, adding that the slow rate meant it would take until 2043 for some parts of the UN to achieve full gender parity. “So even we are not going to be able to say 50:50 by 2030 if we do not speed up.”

Deborah Gillis, the CEO of research advisory organisation Catalyst, described the research her company has done and the significance of the data produced.

“Clearly there’s so much work ahead,” she acknowledged, noting significant movement in the percentages of women in several sectors of economies but adding that the extent of those moves had been nowhere near the expectations. “The picture that emerges from this data is that we have failed to make the significant progress that we’d hoped to.”

She considered the work needed to shift that picture and accelerate change, and called for leadership commitment and individual intent. She also underlined the importance of engaging men and abandoning the idea that gender equality was an issue about women, for women, run by women.

“It really must be a multi-sector focus for us to really see the kinds of achievements that we really all are in for,” she said.
“Men need to be core to that conversation. We need to find more ways to empower them to make change happen.”

Bulgarian national appointed new head of UN regional centre in Central Asia

17 March - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed Petko Draganov of Bulgaria as his Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), located in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

Mr. Draganov will succeed Miroslav Jenca of Slovakia, who was recently appointed Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

“The Secretary-General is grateful to Mr. Jenca for his vision and leadership at the helm of the UNRCCA since its inception,” stated the announcement of the appointment.

The UNRCCA was established in 2007 to assist and support the Governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in finding solutions for emerging problems and eliminating potential threats.

Mr. Draganov currently serves as Deputy Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), a position he has held since 2009. He has also served as First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria and in numerous diplomatic postings in Africa.

FEATURE: Academic who ‘puts his feet on the ground and works with people’ wins 2015 UN award for disaster risk reduction

17 March - A researcher who describes his work as “a life project of teaching, research and dissemination of ideas” has won the 2015 United Nations Sasakawa Award for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Highly respected disaster risk reduction researcher and practitioner, Allan Lavell, was awarded the 2015 Laureate for being “a leader in the disaster risk management community” during work that has spanned more than three decades.

He received the award this evening is a special ceremony held in connection with the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, running in Sendai, Japan, through Wednesday, 18 March.

Born in the United Kingdom, Mr. Lavell has spent most of his career in and focused on Latin America. He is a founding member of the Network of Social Studies in the Prevention of Disasters in Latin America (LA RED).

Ahead of the ceremony, he spoke to the UN News Centre saying he was amazed that he had been nominated for the award and felt that it was a recognition of something that went beyond him and included many other people working hard in the field.

Recalling his his long-term association with the Latin American Social Science Faculty (FLACSO), he said that while he had gotten into the disaster risk reduction field “by one of those chance occurrences,” he had, over the years, carried out many research projects and training courses on the general topic of how risk is generated in society and what are the most adequate mechanisms for intervening in risk.

“All of this within what I call a development framework that sees disaster risk as an unresolved development problem. It's an indicator that something is unsustainable; its an indicator of poverty; its an indicator of inequality; its an indicator of unequal access to remedies and tools ,” he said.
“I don’t have ‘a’ project”, continued Mr. Lavell, explaining he rather had “a life project of teaching, research and dissemination of ideas. New ideas, I hope.” he also worked a lot with the UN Office on Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), particularly on its flagship Global Assessment Report GAR. “I’m in the world of an academic who's not just and academic, but one who puts his feet on the ground and works with people.”

Spotlighting areas of professional pride, he noted that as a university teacher and researcher, he has seen those who have been introduced, encouraged and inspired in some way, go on to “become active, imaginative and committed members of the disaster risk management community in many different walks of life.”

He also believed that he has persisted in and advanced in breaking down disciplinary barriers and sectoral views of disaster risk in order to construct more integral and holistic views in the frame of development.

“If I'm know for anything in Latin America it's for thinking conceptually; for thinking how [disaster risk reduction] should be dealt with. A lot of the new laws in Latin America are based on the precepts and concepts that I've developed over time,” he said, describing his work with governments and intergovernmental agencies, as well as civil society, where he had helped formulate processes around local risk management.

The Head of the Sasakawa Jury, Prof. Murat Balamir, told the ceremony that Mr. Lavell bore the hallmark of excellence demanded of this year's award – themed 'Shaping the Future' – demonstrating a combination of influence, reach, permanency, innovation, efficiency and collaboration.

“The enduring and most influential individual effort of Mr. Lavell, in undertaking various roles in a multi-actor environment, makes him 'a leader in the DRM [Disaster Risk Management] community,’” Prof. Balamir said in his address at one of the signature events at the Conference.

“Personally accessible to all, Mr. Lavell has been capable of tailoring official conduct according to the needs of the local communities, enabling them, and always highlighting the human needs. This has been a 'glue to hold together disparate communities'. This is a timeless model; a model for all times.”

The Sasakawa Jury also awarded Certificates of Distinction to two other nominees. First, Jeffrey Town Farmers' Association of Jamaica, which was created in 1991 to use agriculture as a platform for sustainable development and as a means to redress risk and a lack of investment in marginalized areas.

Ahead of the award ceremony, Director of the Association Ivy Gordon said: “It is truly humbling to know that our efforts to increase our own resilience and those around us should place a traditionally marginalized community on the world stage. We are proud because we didn't begin or continue for glory, we did this for survival and quality of life.”

She told the UN News Centre that the Association felt “like were winners already. We always want to say that ours is not a project but a process; we've been doing things, little by little to try and make our lives less vulnerable.”

Expanding on this, she said, we live in 'Hurricane Alley,’ using the nickname given to the infamous area of warm water in the Atlantic Ocean stretching from the west coast of northern Africa to the east coast of Central America and Gulf Coast of the Southern United States a historical breeding ground for tropical storms.

“We live on top of a hill that is unstable. And so we have done, collectively with resources form a variety of partners, little things that have added layer-by-layer to increase our own resistance to make us better able to live in this world,” she said.

The Second Certificate of Distinction was awarded to the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience and Safer Communities, which brings together six leading CEOs – of the Australian Red Cross, Insurance Australia Group, Investa Property Group, Munich Re, Optus and Westpac – to influence public policy via evidence-based reporting on the unsustainable cost of disasters on life, property and the economy.

Speaking on behalf of the Roundtable before the ceremony, Australian Red Cross CEO Robert Tickner said: “The great achievement of the Roundtable is to help put resilience right up on the agenda of Government and help convince them that
investment up front in disaster preparedness will strengthen communities and save lives as well as huge costs in the longer term.”

He told the *UN News Centre* that all around the world, there is common agreement that Governments need to invest more in disaster risk reduction and building resilience.

“But the truth is, as a planet, we have not been successful in shifting Governments’ policy positions. Yet, in Australia we’ve got a breakthrough because we’ve got the Red Cross working with the business community sending a united and powerful message to the Government about the need to shift their expenditures to protect the people before disaster strikes, and that a huge step forward.”

Asked how he felt about the ceremony and he said: “Well it's a bit like the Oscars, isn't it? I'm very nervous. I'm looking forward to the results, but to be perfectly honest, it's such a humbling and privileged experience to go all around the world in such wonderful company of so many organizations and so many people working hard in their own communities to protect people and build disaster resilience. It’s really a life privilege.”

Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of The Nippon Foundation, which sponsors the award, told the ceremony that disasters are taking place around the world “with unsettling frequency, disrupting the lives of individuals with oftentimes irreversible consequences”.

“As an organization specializing in humanitarian aid, the Nippon Foundation has been engaging in disaster relief and recovery not only within Japan but overseas for many years,” Mr. Sasakawa said.

“Having firsthand experience of the grave impact that disaster has on human life, we established the Sasakawa Award programme with the United Nations 30 years ago,” he said, adding that the aim was to establish a global platform where knowledge and experience can be polled, shared and utilized to reduce the impact of natural disasters for all people.

“Over the decades, disaster risk reduction has moved from a narrowly perceived technical discipline, to a more broad-based global movement with a focus on sustainable development.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UNISDR, Margareta Wahlström said: “In our community, there is a lot going on, all the time. As a reflection of this, the disaster risk reduction community nominated 88 individuals and organizations (from 44 countries) for the Sasakawa Award this year. Thank you for that.”

**UNICEF: on disaster resilience, ‘we must listen to those who know their communities’**

17 March - Children and youth are a major part of community-level responses to disasters and must play an important role in risk reduction, United Nations officials said today in Sendai, Japan, with the head of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) challenging a gathering of youth representatives to demand that they be involved in processes that impact them.

“We cannot prevent floods, droughts and storms but with better planning, preparation and response, these things don’t have to become disasters – and they won’t, if we listen to those who know their local communities the best,” UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake told a side event in Sendai, Japan, as part of the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction.

Taking up the title of the event – ‘Children and Youth - Don't Decide My Future Without Me’ – to challenge the energetic participants, Mr. Lake said every child in every community deserves every opportunity to thrive. Disaster preparedness must reflect needs of every child everywhere. Let us be involved! Demand it!”

Illustrating the vital need for such participation, he said that since the end of the 1990's, climate change-related disasters affected some 60 million children, while in the coming decades, that number was expected to rise to 200 million, putting
even more children at risk of dying, being out of school and facing risk of trafficking and exploitation. And indeed, it was the poorest, most isolated and most vulnerable that would be most at risk.

Yet there has been some solid progress, including in the Sendai area, which was devastated in 2011 by a tsunami and flood. Evacuation drills, teacher training and preparation of emergency packs were but a few examples of the programmes under way in local elementary schools.

Spotlighting other examples, he said community-based health care in Niger had saved some 60,000 children in 2009 alone; early warning systems and cyclone-resistant classrooms in Madagascar had ensured that no child died in a disaster-related incident there since 2006.

In many areas, children and youth were getting involved, said Mr. Lake, noting that in Nepal, children’s maps of their communities and schools had been included in preparedness exercises.

Ahmad Alendhawi, UN Special Envoy for Youth, who moderated the event, said children and youth have proven that they are “part of the response and part of the solution”

“Young people and children are not coming to [intergovernmental negotiations] to be cool,” he continued, explaining that boosting youth participation has been a major shift in the way the United Nations is doing business. “Engaging young people in a systematic way is not a seasonal exercise; half of the world population is under 25 years of age,” so it would benefit no one to ignore this.