As UN-backed talks continue, Security Council calls for political solution to Libyan crisis

17 June - The Security Council has emphasized the urgency for Libyan stakeholders to reach a political solution to the country’s crisis amid ongoing United Nations-facilitated talks.

In a statement issued late this afternoon, the 15-member Council “strongly encouraged” all participants of the Libyan Political Dialogue “to positively consider” the proposals contained in the fourth draft of the political agreement which emerged from the most recent round of talks held in Morocco from 8 to 9 June.

“The members of the Security Council reiterated that there can be no military solution to the crisis in Libya and that reaching a Political Agreement leading to the formation of a Government of National Accord is critical to ending Libya’s political, security and institutional crises, and to confront the rising threat of terrorism,” the statement continued.

Delegations represented in the Libyan political talks recently met in Germany’s capital for UN-led discussions hosted with senior officials from a number of States, including the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom.

According to UN Special Representative on Libya, Bernardino León, who was in attendance, the meeting saw representatives of the five permanent members of the Security Council send a “very strong message” of unity and support to Libya and its parties.

That broad message of support was echoed in today’s statement which said the Council welcomed the efforts made by all participants of the political dialogue and of the other tracks of the peace process, including civil society contributions, local-level ceasefires, prisoner exchanges, and the return of internally displaced persons.
In addition, the UN body noted it was prepared to sanction those who continue to threaten Libya’s peace, stability and security while reaffirming their strong commitment to the North African country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Meanwhile, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq reported today that Mr. León continues to engage with the Libyan parties on the agreement he put forward for their consideration on 8 June.

“Discussions are continuing, and we were pleased to see that Tripoli has favourably responded to the agreement. We expect the same from the parliament in Tobruk in the coming days,” he said, adding that as the UN Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has made clear, the agreement offers the best chance for Libya to overcome the current crisis and set a path forward for the remainder of the transition that is consistent with the goals of the 2011 revolution.

**At Security Council, UN troop commanders recount challenges of modern peacekeeping**

17 June - From Mali to South Sudan and the Middle East and beyond, United Nations peacekeepers are tackling peace and security challenges of increasing intensity and broader global breadth, the top UN peacekeeping official said today as he urged the full support of the international community for the Organization’s ‘blue helmets’ as they confront the world’s manifold threats.

Opening the Security Council’s meeting on protection of civilians, operational threats and performance, held earlier today at UN Headquarters in New York, Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous, introduced the force commanders of three UN operations – the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS); the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); and the UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) – observing that each of them had a story of courage and determination to tell.

At the same time, he said, the three UN military officials could also relate the growing challenges they and their peacekeepers were facing in the diverse environments across the globe to which they were deployed, particularly due to the unprecedented scale of difficulties they now faced in protecting civilians, observing the caveats imposed by troop-contributing countries, and dealing with asymmetric threats.

Detailing the most pressing aspects of peacekeeping in South Sudan, where an intensifying crisis has forced over 2 million people into internal displacement and plunged an estimated 4.6 million people into severe food insecurity, UNMISS Force Commander, Lieutenant-General Yohannes Gebremeskel Tesfamariam, told Council Members that protection of civilians was not just about ensuring security but also guaranteeing the freedom of movement for people.

“The ability to move and proactively protect civilians in their areas of origin, securing their traditional movement and enabling them to undertake their livelihoods, must be a focus of our efforts in implementing the protection of civilians mandate,” he explained.

Throughout the African country, more than 140,000 people are currently sheltering at UNMISS bases where they seek safety and humanitarian relief from South Sudan’s two-year conflict.

Lieutenant-General Tesfamariam warned, however, that the UN civilian protection sites have increasingly become targets in the fighting with a recent incident, dated between 19 and 21 May, seeing more than 20 artillery shells and stray bullets hit the UNMISS base in Melut, in the country’s northeast. This and other similar security threats had contributed to increasingly stretching the Mission’s operational abilities.

“It is well understood that protection of civilians is the most resource consuming operation. It requires logistical, financial and human resources, resources that fit the mandate, expectations and realities on the ground,” he continued. “The limitations that we face in this respect, particularly the absence of critical enablers, such as close-air support, adequate logistics, intelligence, reconnaissance, and responsive CASEVAC/MEDEVAC capabilities, negatively impact our early
The appeal for more wide-ranging and better equipment was echoed by Major General Michael Lollesgaard, the Force Commander for MINUSMA in Mali, where UN troops are currently operating in one of the more hazardous regions for peacekeeping. MINUSMA forces have frequently been targeted by armed groups operating throughout the vast country with recent attacks in late April resulting in numerous casualties.

“We need to be fully capable of facing this environment in all aspects,” the Major General declared. “That means capability to face hostile armed groups hiding amongst the population and to face challenging climates, geography and infrastructure.”

In order to do that, he said, UN peacekeepers must be properly trained prior to deployment; properly equipped; assisted with robust logistics; and furnished with “well-protected camps with good living conditions,” among other things.

“I know this sounds like a lot,” he acknowledged, “but this is what we need if we want to be able to survive in an asymmetric environment.”

The challenges facing peacekeepers stretch, however, beyond their immediate operational needs and also involve distinct political obstacles, added Major General Michael Finn, Chief of Staff at UNTSO – the first ever peacekeeping operation established by the UN – who highlighted the imposition of national caveats as a “significant restriction” on multinational operations around the world.

Caveats, the Major General affirmed, remain a serious impediment to the command and performance of all UN missions and ultimately restrict a commanders’ ability to exercise command and control in theatres of operation, potentially compromising the ability of ‘blue helmets’ to effectuate their tasks.

“I fully recognize the national interests that drive caveats, but I also see that caveats threaten to ‘drive a wedge’ between contributing nations, threatening as well peacekeeping and observer capabilities of the UN,” he noted.

“Thus, it is a critical challenge to find ways to address the contentious issue of caveats and to maintain the integrity of peacekeeping missions into the future.”

**In Damascus, UN envoy wraps up talks with Syrian parties, condemns violence against civilians**

17 June - The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria ended today a three-day visit to Damascus, which took place in the framework of the current consultations aimed at operationalizing the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012.

While in the capital, Staffan de Mistura met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem.

According to a UN spokesperson, he stressed that the heavy bombings by Government forces on Tuesday night on Douma, which caused significant civilian casualties, calls for a “strong condemnation.”

“No context justifies the indiscriminate targeting of civilian areas or the use of collective punishment by a Government,” he said.

Mr. de Mistura emphasized the necessity of protecting civilians, underlining once again that the use of barrel bombs is “unacceptable,” and that it is an obligation under international humanitarian law for any government, “in all circumstances,” to protect its civilians.

While in Damascus, the Special Envoy also reaffirmed his strong condemnation of the attacks on civilians by armed
opposition forces that coincided with his presence in the country, such as Monday’s attacks in Aleppo, which caused significant civilian casualties and yesterday’s mortar shelling that hit central Damascus.

In the course of his meetings, the Special Envoy furthermore underscored the dire humanitarian situation on the ground and insisted on greater access to besieged areas and conflict-affected communities, particularly in light of the month of Ramadan.

In Syria, Mr. de Mistura also met with more than 30 political parties, religious figures and civil society organisations.

**Palestinian refugee crisis a ‘time bomb’ for Middle East region, warns UN official**

17 June - The stark conditions afflicting millions of displaced Palestinians across the Middle East risk destabilizing the region and plunging it into a deeper humanitarian and security crisis, the head of the United Nations agency assisting Palestinian refugees has warned.

“The isolation, exclusion and dispossession of Palestine refugees in Syria, Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan and Lebanon represent a time-bomb for the Middle East region,” Pierre Krähenbühl, the Commissioner General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), said yesterday at a meeting of the agency’s Advisory Commission of major donors and host governments, held in Amman, Jordan.

Amid an explosive conflict in Syria and ongoing tensions across Gaza and the West Bank, Mr. Krähenbühl told delegates in attendance that more than five million Palestinian refugees currently face “an existential crisis on many fronts,” ultimately resulting in “a denial of dignity and rights that must be addressed.”

The situation afflicting the Palestinians across the Middle East region is, in fact, quite dramatic, according to the latest UN data. Gaza today is home of the highest unemployment in the world, with more than 60 per cent of young people not working.

Meanwhile, some 60,000 Palestine refugees from Syria have fled to Lebanon and Jordan, putting pressure on host communities. From Syria’s Yarmouk and Jordan’s camps to the West Bank, the lives of Palestine refugees are constrained, with poverty and deprivation overflowing in overcrowded camps and the needs of the communities continuing to grow resources.

At the same time, a recent UNRWA situation report from mid-May warned that the vulnerability of civilians in Yarmouk remains of the highest severity. The UN agency has repeatedly voiced its deep concern that without access, the most basic humanitarian needs of up to 18,000 Palestinian and Syrian civilians, including 3,500 children, continue to be left unmet.

“Being a Palestine refugee in Gaza means being a victim of a blockade that affects every aspect of one’s life and being dependent on food aid while being educated and wishing to be self-sufficient. Being a Palestine refugee in Aida camp near Bethlehem means living under the fear of daily incursions and detentions, as well as the anguish of denied access to opportunities. Being a Palestine refugee in the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus means being a resident trapped by a merciless siege and bombardments and violence, deprived of regular access to water, food, electricity and basic health,” Mr. Krähenbühl declared.

Adding to the UNRWA head’s list of concerns was the dire situation facing the agency’s emergency funding which, for the Syria appeal, currently stands at only 27 per cent met. The Gaza reconstruction appeal is similarly underfunded with only $216 million in pledges received out of a total $720 million needed.

“Currently, UNRWA confronts a funding shortfall for core activities – such as schools for half a million children – to cover the year 2015 of USD101 million,” he continued. “UNRWA at present could pay salaries and cover activities only into September.”
Mr. Krähenbühl explained that his agency would organize a special consultation with host governments within the next ten days to exchange further views on the critical situation facing UNRWA’s efforts and the conditions of Palestinian refugees.

On Day to Combat Desertification, UN urges action to protect ‘every hectare’ of arable land

17 June - Land is a renewable resource, but only if investments are made in land degradation neutrality, which has been proposed as an element of the post-2015 development agenda, today said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his message on the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought.

“We need to change course and start securing every hectare of land that can provide food or freshwater and rehabilitate all the degraded land that we can,” urged Mr. Ban, who assured that by doing so, the international community will be able to make rapid steps towards controlling climate change.

With No such thing as a free lunch: Investing in healthy soils as the theme, this year’s Day is intended to promote public awareness of the issues of desertification and drought, and the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

“Our lives and civilizations depend on the land. Let us invest in healthy soils to secure our rights to food and freshwater,” Mr. Ban added.

When a plate of food is served in front of you, what comes to mind? Few of us actually think about it, but it is the endpoint of a long and complex process…Without the land, there is only an empty plate,” underscored Monique Barbut, who is the UNCCD Executive Secretary.

Noting that 70 per cent of the Earth’s grasslands, 50 per cent of the savannahs and 45 per cent of its temperate forests have been cleared to feed generations gone by, she expressed her deep concern that resources are treated like disposable goods.

“We degrade the land through unsustainable farming and walk away when it cannot produce anymore. Today, one third of previously fertile farmland lies abandoned. With a population of 9.6 billion expected by 2050, we will need to clear 3 million hectares of new land every year, on average,” she explained, warning that “we are heading towards a tipping point.”

“If we do not change how we use our land, we will have to convert an area the size of Norway into new farmland every year to meet future needs for food, freshwater, biofuels and urban growth,” underscored Mr. Ban.

A number of organizations from the UN system are involved in the fight against desertification, as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), which has established a number of regional Drought Monitoring Centres in Africa, for example.

Over the last four decades, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Director-General Irina Bokova said, has contributed to global efforts to combat desertification through such scientific programmes as its Man and the Biosphere Programme and International Hydrological Programme.

For his part, the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Braulio F. de Souza Dias, said the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 offers solutions, “in particular Aichi Biodiversity Target 5, which aims to at least halve and bring as close to zero as possible the rate of loss of natural habitats, and Aichi Target 15 which aims to restore at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems, seek to reverse the negative trend of land degradation.”

In addition, he expanded on the proposed sustainable development goal on land for the post-2015 agenda, which is based on three simultaneous actions: avoid degrading additional land, recover as much as we can of that which is already degraded, and, for every hectare of land we degrade, to rehabilitate a hectare of degraded land in the same ecosystem and the same...
timeframe.

“A world where all rights to food, water and human security are guaranteed is possible,” the UN Secretary-General assured.

**UN agency airlifts lifesaving survival kits to displaced in hard-to-reach areas of South Sudan**

**17 June** - The United Nations agriculture agency has launched an emergency airlift operation in South Sudan and has distributed to families fleeing violence in hard-to-reach areas supplies ranging from nutritional biscuits for children, mosquito nets, vegetable seeds, water purification tablets and oral rehydration salts.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced yesterday that the first distribution of survival kits was delivered by helicopter, targeting an estimated 28,000 people displaced by the fighting with approximately 4,500 kits.

Recent violence in South Sudan has affected an estimated 750,000 people in Greater Upper Nile and forced approximately 150,000 people to flee their homes, many to extremely remote areas. Most are rural households, forced to abandon their lands before they could plant this season’s main crops.

As an emergency response, the UN humanitarian community developed portable, lifesaving survival kits, weighing just 9 kilograms, which include mosquito nets, short-maturity vegetable seeds, fishing supplies, water carrying containers, water purification tablets, oral rehydration salts, nutritional biscuits for children and kitchen sets with cups, spoons, pots and plates.

“It is a top priority for FAO to reach these displaced communities, who in most cases have missed the planting season this year. This operation will provide people with a short-term capacity to survive,” said Karim Bah, FAO Deputy Representative in South Sudan.

The Representative for the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in South Sudan, Jonathan Veitch, said: “The majority of those who have fled recent violence are children who will not survive without basic necessities like food and clean water. This short-term response is crucial while we work on restoring services devastated by conflict.”

FAO and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are closely coordinating the operation with support from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and development of the kits was a multi-agency effort, supported by FAO, IOM, UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and other partners.

Partner agencies working with the International Rescue Committee and Mercy Corps distribute the kits on the ground to ensure that the delivery of aid does not further expose beneficiaries to security risks, according to FAO.

“The priority of all agencies working on the response is unrestricted access to displaced communities and the redeployment of full teams on the ground,” FAO said.

More than 2.1 million people have been displaced by the crisis in South Sudan since December 2013. Nearly 1.9 million people have been reached with humanitarian assistance since January 2015, but $1 billion is needed to continue lifesaving operations to match the mounting needs across the country.
Yemen: Envoy says UN-backed consultations ‘important start towards return to political process’

17 June - The United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, has deemed the fact that both Yemeni delegations are in now Geneva to participate in the UN-facilitated consultations “an important start towards the return to a political process,” a spokesperson for the world body said today.

Speaking to reporters at UN Headquarters in New York, spokesperson Farhan Haq said Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed had spoken to the press in Geneva last night, and had said that the significance of having in Geneva both delegations to the Yemen consultations should not be underestimated.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon attended the opening of the consultations on Monday and told the press that the parties in Yemen had a responsibility to end the fighting and begin a real process of peace and reconciliation. “Yemen’s very existence hangs in the balance. While parties bicker, Yemen burns,” Mr. Ban underscored at that time.

Today, Mr. Haq noted that Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed said that, after meetings with both parties, he clearly communicated to both delegations that the number of participants should be limited to an overall number of 10 persons per delegation.

According to the spokesperson, Mr. Ould Cheikh said that both the Yemeni and international community are looking to the Geneva consultations as a peaceful way out of the conflict and to safeguard the achievement of Yemen’s transition as set out in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreement and its implementation mechanism, and supported and followed by various Security Council Resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2216 (2015) and the outcome of the National Dialogue.

“He added that discussions will hopefully foster mechanisms that create confidence, increase the chances of implementation of the different Security Council resolutions and ensure that compromises on one side will not be abused by the other,” said Mr. Haq.

MERS outbreak in Republic of Korea is ‘wake-up call’ for highly mobile world – UN health agency

17 June - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) today declared the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, or MERS, outbreak that spread from the Middle East to the Republic of Korea does not constitute a ‘public health emergency of international concern’ but is nonetheless a “wake-up call” for all countries to be prepared for the unanticipated spread of serious infectious diseases.

The Emergency Committee, convened by the WHO Director-General under the International Health Regulations regarding Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in regards to the outbreak in the Republic of Korea also recommended against the application of any travel or trade restrictions and considers screening at points of entry to be unnecessary at this time.

WHO did recommend “raising awareness about MERS and its symptoms among those travelling to and from affected areas” as “good public health practice.”

At a press conference in Geneva following the meeting of the Emergency Committee, WHO Assistant Director-General, Dr. Keiji Fukuda, who took part in a joint WHO/Republic of Korea joint mission to look into the MERS outbreak described the
current situation as “the largest outbreak that has occurred outside of the Middle East,” and as of today, there have been 162 cases of infections in the country, where 19 deaths have been officially reported.

Dr. Fukuda also said more than 6,500 people in the Republic of Korea are being monitored, and to date, 10,000 people have been monitored, which, he noted, are “quite high numbers” that had raised anxiety levels internationally.

He provided a briefing on the “major pieces of information” the Committee heard such as about the virus itself, current risk factors and status of transmissions.

“On the bases of this information and extensive discussion, the Emergency Committee unanimously agreed that the current situation was of concern but that it did not constitute a public health emergency of international concern,” Dr. Fukuda said. “This was transmitted to the Director General [Dr. Margaret Chan] and she has agreed with their guidance.”

The Committee, however, “expressed its assessment that this outbreak is a wakeup call and that in a highly mobile world, all countries should always be prepared for the unanticipated possibility of outbreaks of this, and other serious infectious diseases.”

The Committee noted that there are still many gaps in knowledge regarding the transmission of this virus between people, including the potential role of environmental contamination, poor ventilation and other factors, and indicated that continued research in these areas was critical.

According to WHO, MERS is a viral respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus (MERS-CoV) that was first identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012.

Typical MERS symptoms include fever, cough and shortness of breath. Pneumonia is common, but not always present. Gastrointestinal symptoms, including diarrhoea, have also been reported.

According to WHO, MERS is a viral respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus (MERS-CoV) that was first identified in Saudi Arabia in 2012.

Humanitarian needs at ‘all-time high,’ top UN relief official tells Economic and Social Council

17 June - Humanitarian needs are at an all-time high, the top United Nations relief official declared today, stressing that while the Organization needs no less than $18.8 billion to meet the needs of nearly 80 million people, it has received only 26 per cent of that amount.

“Each statistic represents a personal tragedy for someone: separation from home and community; missing out on an education; failure to plant the seeds for next year’s harvest; a life of instability and uncertainty.” Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Stephen O’Brien told the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which kicked off its annual three-day Humanitarian Affairs Segment in Geneva today.

“In Syria, 12.2 million people need humanitarian assistance; in South Sudan, 4.6 million face severe food insecurity. In Ukraine, 1.3 million have been forced to flee the violence,” he stressed, also bringing attention on the 20 million people at risk of hunger in the Sahel, and the 850,000 refugees and returnees who are currently hosted by Chad and Niger.

During his recent visit to Iraq, Mr. O’Brien, who is also the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, met families with the “most heart-breaking stories of fear, flight, loss and grief,” while in Yemen, some twenty million people – an “unimaginable number,” “80 per cent of the population” – are now in need of humanitarian aid.

As a whole, more than 110 million people around the world depend on humanitarian organisations, for life-saving assistance and protection.
“Our donors have not faltered in their generosity,” the Under-Secretary-General acknowledged. Funding to inter-agency appeals reached a record $10.7 billion in 2014, he noted, and contributions to country-based pooled funds and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) received more than a billion dollars.

“But growing needs far outpace the resource available to meet them, leaving an ever widening gap,” he warned, urging to “reform and diversify the funding model,” and make it more predictable.

He went on to note that protracted crises have become the new normal and are also contributing to the problem. The average duration of a humanitarian appeal is now more than seven years.

“We have been providing lifesaving support to millions of people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan for more than a decade,” Mr. O’Brien explained.

Presenting to Council members the Secretary-General’s report on ‘Strengthening the Coordination of Emergency Assistance of the United Nations,’ Mr. O’Brien explained that the Organization must reverse the trend that has transformed, over the years, humanitarians in “default providers of essential services,” disempowering affected people and perpetuating dependency.

To implement that recommendation, the UN must work with the many new organizations and groups that are involved in humanitarian action, the Under-Secretary-General continued.

“These range from NGOs and civil society to diaspora communities and the private sector. Connecting and leveraging the comparative advantages of these different actors will enable us to bring additional resources, knowledge and skills to our work.”

The World Humanitarian Summit, to be held next year in Istanbul, Turkey, will be a good platform for Heads of State and Government, and leaders from civil society, the private sector, crisis-affected communities and multilateral organizations to announce their “commitments to change.”

Also emphasizing the crisis in the protection of civilians, he reminded governments and parties to conflict that they bear the primary responsibility to protect and provide for the needs of people under their control.

“However, across conflicts, we see Government forces and non-State actors directly attacking civilians, bombing hospitals and schools, and using explosive weapons in populated areas, despite knowing that over 90 per cent of the casualties will be civilians. We see parties to conflict use rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence as weapons of war.”

Apart the “moral outrage,” such a situation undermines “the credibility and authority of the United Nations, its entire membership and the international system,” he concluded.

In his remarks, Sam Kutesa, President of the UN General Assembly stressed that this September, world leaders are expected to adopt in New York, an ambitious and transformative post-2015 development agenda. The overarching objective of the new development framework will be the eradication of poverty, taking into account the three dimensions of sustainable development; economic, social and environmental.

“The new development agenda will have a significant impact on development for the next fifteen years and beyond” he said, adding that it will place a renewed emphasis on reducing economic fragility and addressing social disparities within and between countries, while also taking concrete steps to protect the environment.

Collective action on the part of Member States and the United Nations system will be of vital importance. “In this regard, ECOSOC will have a central role to play in advancing an integrated approach to a unified and universal agenda.”

“In a world where protracted crises have become the norm, and where disasters can wipe out years of development in a blink of an eye, the well-being of the most vulnerable and marginalized must be addressed in our future development objectives,” continued Mr. Kutesa, underscoring that the humanitarian community must be actively involved in shaping and
implementing the post-2015 development framework.

“Together, we can ensure the future development agenda embraces the needs of all people around the world; improving their daily lives, while preserving the planet for future generations.”

Amid ‘constructive atmosphere,’ UN special envoy welcomes continuation of Cyprus negotiations

17 June - The Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders have agreed to continue their pursuit of a comprehensive settlement for the political issues facing the Mediterranean island following their third meeting today, the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide, has announced.

In a statement issued earlier this morning, Mr. Eide confirmed that the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mustafa Akıncı, and the Greek Cypriot leader, Nicos Anastasiades, had pursued their goal of reaching a comprehensive settlement as soon as possible with “strong determination” and “driven by their joint commitment” to the process.

“Upon completing the baseline assessment, the leaders are now entering into substantive negotiations on unresolved core issues,” he declared. “The leaders agreed that these negotiations will be the centrepiece of their work from now on and that they will be dealt with in a holistic and interdependent manner.”

During the course of their recent talks, the UN official continued, both Mr. Akıncı and Mr. Anastasiades continued their work on further confidence-building measures in parallel to the negotiation process while also formulating a mandate for the new committee on gender equality for which they appointed members.

“Reaffirming the constructive atmosphere at the negotiating table, Mr. Anastasiades and Mr. Akıncı expressed once again their resolve to move forward without delay and to achieve further progress towards reaching a comprehensive settlement,” Mr. Eide concluded.

The next meeting between the Cypriot leaders will kick-off on 29 June.

Integrated international approach needed to tackle plight of Roma – UN rights expert

17 June - Noting that economic, political and social marginalization of Roma communities remains a major issue, a United Nations human rights expert urged thinking outside the “poverty paradigm” and adopting an integrated approach to address their plight.

“I urge States to place Roma rights at the heart of all strategies and policies related to human and minority rights, social inclusion and development, with explicit targets for Roma communities,” Rita Izsák, the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, said yesterday presenting her latest report the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The deeply embedded social and structural discrimination Roma face worldwide, including anti-Gypsyism, Ms. Izsák stressed, is an overarching factor for the marginalization of Roma.

Among other issues, the report highlights the marginalization Roma communities face, underscores the lack of attention to Roma outside Europe, notes the ongoing invisibility of many of these communities such as underrepresentation in decision-making bodies, and condemns media stereotypes against Roma.
While the Special Rapporteur noted some positive developments in her report, these however tended to be short-term, issue-specific projects that fail to address Roma communities disadvantage at many levels.

“Creating conditions for the effective participation of Roma in all aspects of the life of the State … should be considered by States as an integral aspect of good governance and a key priority in efforts to ensure equality and non-discrimination,” Ms. Izsák said.

Also suggested in her report are steps to combat discrimination and to guarantee the full enjoyment of the human rights of Roma.

“The media should promote non-stereotypical portrayals of Roma, including through providing greater visibility to Roma self-representation, history and culture,” said the Special Rapporteur, emphasizing the potential that traditional and new media have to promote intercultural dialogue between Roma and non-Roma communities.

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

**Ban urges insurance industry leaders to play strong role in shaping more sustainable future**

17 June - As a major source of long-term investment, the insurance industry can and must play a strong role in shaping a more sustainable future, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, urging the industry to show strong leadership and voice support for a host of upcoming United Nations-led initiatives aimed at ensuring a more sustainable world for all.

“This is a critical year for action,” Mr. Ban said in remarks to the International Insurance Society Global Insurance Forum in New York, spotlighting major UN events – the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa, in July; a special summit in New York In September where Member States will meet on sustainable development; and a meeting of parties to the UN climate change convention this December in Paris.

“With these events, the world has an historic opportunity to adopt a new set of sustainable development goals and to put the world on track for long-term, low-carbon, climate-resilient growth,” he said, explaining that, with climate change impacts accelerating and weather-related disasters becoming more frequent and intense, people and organizations all over the world are demanding leadership and action.

Both public and private sector support is needed, underscored the UN chief, adding that the insurance industry can play an important role, especially in helping to ease the financial burden associated with disasters and to protect the vulnerable.

“The insurance sector is well-placed to be a leader in risk sensitive investments,” he said, noting that disaster risk reduction is a front-line defence against the impact of climate change and it is a smart, cost-effective and life-saving investment. Moreover, it is time for global action on resilience and risk reduction that not only anticipates and absorbs climate risks, but also reshapes them into an opportunity for safer, sustainable development.

“The insurance industry rose to the challenge in last year’s Climate Summit by announcing a commitment to double its climate-smart investment by the end of 2015. We must ensure that commitments made at the Summit are now implemented,” the Secretary-General declared, urging the industry to think more strategically about how climate risks can be reduced, and to adjust their investments accordingly, as well as to work with governments, especially in developing countries, to help bring about these changes.

“You have seen the tragic human toll rise from extreme weather events. You know the staggering economic price tag. I call on you to show even stronger leadership. Voice your support for an ambitious agreement in Paris, said urging the
participants to heed the example of industry leaders, including Axa, which recently pledged to decarbonize its assets. “Increase investments in resilient, low-carbon infrastructure. And create the innovative financial tools that will make markets work for a safer climate.”