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Security Council demands that Syrian parties cease attacks against civilians and work towards political solution to crisis

17 August - The United Nations Security Council reiterated today its demand that all parties to the conflict in Syria must cease any attacks against civilians, as well as any indiscriminate use of weapons in populated areas, and work towards a political solution to the years-long crisis.

“The only sustainable solution to the current crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, with a view to full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012 and, in this regard, emphasizes the urgency for all parties to work diligently and constructively towards this goal,” says a statement read by the Council President for the month of August and Ambassador of Nigeria, Joy Ogwu.

Laying out key steps in a process to end the violence, the Geneva Communiqué, adopted in 2012 by the first international conference on the issue and later endorsed by the Security Council, calls, among others, for the establishment of a transitional governing body, with full executive powers and made up by members of the present Government and the opposition and other groups, as part of agreed principles and guidelines for a Syrian-led political transition.

On July 29, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, set out to the Council a new approach. “In order to work towards political negotiations and a political transition based on the Geneva Communiqué, four thematic areas need to be addressed through more focused consultations and discussions with the Syrian parties in four thematic working groups:
safety and protection for all; political and legal issues; military, security and counterterrorism issues; and continuity of public services and reconstruction and development,” reminded the presidential statement.

Supporting this approach, the Security Council today urged all parties to engage “in good faith” in Special Envoy’s efforts, and to continue consultations and thematic discussions, building up on recent meetings in Moscow, Cairo, Paris and Astana. It added that rapid progress on a political solution should include full participation by all segments of Syrian society, including women.

“The Security Council requests that the Secretary-General report back to [it] on the results of the next phase of consultations within 90 days.”

Also expressing its “gravest” concern that parts of Syria are under control of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al Nusrah Front (ANF), the Security Council reaffirmed its resolve to address all aspects of the threat, calling on all parties to commit to putting an end to terrorist acts perpetrated by these groups.

The Syrian crisis, stated the Council, has become the largest humanitarian emergency crisis in the world today, threatening peace and security in the region, and that at least 250,000 have been killed, including well over 10,000 children, and 12 million people have been forced to flee their homes, including over 4 million who have sought refuge in neighboring countries, and more than 12.2 million people in Syria require urgent humanitarian assistance.

**Alarmed by escalation of conflict in Ukraine, Ban calls on parties to resume dialogue**

17 August - Seriously alarmed by the recent escalation of violence in eastern Ukraine, which has reportedly resulted in the death of civilians on both sides of the contact line, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called all parties to end hostilities and resume talks.

“[The Secretary-General] calls on all sides to continue with dialogue and to fully abide by the spirit and letter of the Minsk agreements, including as related to the use of heavy weapons. Continued cease-fire violations and the resulting loss of life are unacceptable,” said a statement issued by the Office of the UN Spokesperson.

Aware of reports of harassment aimed at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Mr. Ban expects all parties to fully respect the role of its personnel and facilities, adds the statement.

“He also calls on all sides to take urgent steps to de-escalate the current situation and prevent a spiral of violence that will lead to more deaths, human suffering and destruction of infrastructure and negatively affect regional stability.”

They are equally asked to provide unrestricted and unconditional access for critical humanitarian assistance, and freedom of movement for civilians throughout the country, “in order to address a deteriorating humanitarian situation.”

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine transcended what was initially seen as an internal Ukrainian political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country, later reaching full-scale conflict in the east. Nevertheless, despite a September 2014 cease-fire agreed in Minsk, the fighting has since continuously deteriorated, with serious consequences for the country’s unity, territorial integrity and stability.
Shocked by explosion in Bangkok, UN chief hopes perpetrators will be ‘brought to justice’

17 August - United Nations Secretary-General ban Ki-moon was shocked to learn of an explosion today close to a shrine in the centre of Thailand’s capital, Bangkok, which caused the loss of life of innocent civilians.

“[The Secretary-General] expresses his condolences to the bereaved families and to the people and Government of Thailand, and wishes those injured a quick recovery,” said a statement attributable to a UN spokesperson.

According to the media, a bomb hidden inside the Erawan shrine exploded, killing dozens of people.

“The Secretary-General hopes that those responsible will be brought to justice,” adds the statement.

UN mission vows full investigation into allegations of abuse by peacekeepers in Central African Republic

17 August - The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) said today that it is determined to investigate fully all allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by its forces in the country and to hold to account perpetrators of such acts.

During the regular press briefing at UN Headquarters in New York, spokesperson Vannina Maestracci said, “investigations into recent allegations of sexual assault on a minor and killings by UN forces in Bangui are ongoing.”

Information gathered by the Human Rights and Child Protection sections and the MINUSCA police have been submitted to the UN internal oversight body (OIOS), which is mandated to investigate cases of alleged misconduct by UN forces, identify perpetrators and ensure accountability for victims.

“The investigation is complicated by the numerous nationalities of police and military personnel involved in the operations launched in the ‘PK5’ area of (the capital) Bangui on 2 and 3 August,” she continued. “MINUSCA will not publish preliminary findings that may be prejudicial to the ongoing investigation.”

Adopting a position of transparency if its forces commit abuses, MINUSCA’s stance is that its own peacekeepers be held to the same high standards as that expected of others.

Issuing its own statement, MINUSCA declared: “All allegations of misconduct by United Nations staff is the Central African Republic (CAR) are taken extremely seriously, and are the subject of thorough investigation.”

MINUSCA stressed that it will work with troop contributing countries to ensure that any of its uniformed personnel found to be responsible for human rights violations in CAR, including sexual exploitation and abuse, are held to account. In July, six peacekeepers were repatriated for excessive use of force against detainees.
Since its creation in April 2014, MINUSCA has investigated 57 cases of misconduct, of which 11 involve allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Ms. Maestracci elaborated that the mission was determined to punish any acts of misconduct, including sexual violence by its personnel – hence the importance of protecting the integrity of the investigations and the confidentiality of victims and witnesses.

“MINUSCA…reiterates its utter determination to enforce the Secretary-General’s zero tolerance policy against sexual exploitation or abuse by its personnel,” Ms. Maestracci concluded.

The mission’s Child Protection Section, with UNICEF, is offering appropriate support to the victim of the alleged sexual assault.

**Burundi: Ban condemns assassination of senior army officer amid ‘troubling’ political violence**

**17 August** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned the assassination Burundi’s former Army Chief of Staff, Colonel Jean Bikomagu, who was shot dead by unknown assailants in the capital, Bujumbura on 15 August, the second killing of a senior official in the crisis-torn country this month.

“[The Secretary-General] is troubled by the trend of politically-motivated violence in Burundi. He welcomes the Government’s decision to carry out investigations, and arrests and trials of the perpetrators behind the recent killings,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.

The Secretary-General, the statement added, reiterated his calls to all Burundians to resume an inclusive dialogue without delay to peacefully settle their differences, as well as the commitment of the UN to support the efforts aimed at consolidating peace and stability in their country.

On 2 August, another officer, General Adolphe Nshimirimana, was killed by a rocket attack.

**Security Council says dialogue key to peaceful resolution of crisis in Guinea-Bissau**

**17 August** - Expressing concern over the current political developments in Guinea-Bissau, the United Nations Security Council has called on leaders to seek dialogue and consensus in resolving the crisis in the interest of peace in the country.

“Members of the Security Council called on parties to resolve the ongoing political dispute in the interest of peace in Guinea-Bissau,” reads a press statement issued Friday evening.

Following a 14 August briefing by Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Council members urged all parties in Guinea-Bissau to remain calm, while calling on the security forces, civil society and political leaders to continue to act in a peaceful manner in accordance with the constitution and the rule of law.

Non-interference of security forces, underscored the 15-member body, is of importance in the political situation of Guinea Bissau.

The Council welcomed the continued engagement of UN Special Representative for Guinea-Bissau Miguel Trovoada, President Macky Sall, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other interlocutors in the search for a peaceful solution to the impasse.
Council members also underlined the need for concerted action between ECOWAS, the African Union, Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), the European Union and the United Nations.

“They called on leaders to seek dialogue and consensus in resolving the crisis in a manner that serves the interests of the Bissau-Guinean people,” said the statement.

Sounding a similar note of concern in an interview with UN Radio, Marco Carmignani, Deputy Head of the UN's peacebuilding office in Guinea-Bissau, known as UNIOGBIS, said “there must be resolution through dialogue by and between Bissau-Guineans.”

According to Mr. Carmignani, the situation on the streets remained calm and there were no major demonstrations following the decision by the President reportedly to dissolve the Government and dismiss the Prime Minister, who was consulting with political parties in the National Assembly.

“This consultation is part of the constitutional requirement, for both the nomination and exoneration of the prime minister,” said Mr. Carmignani.

“The people have a great hope that Guinea Bissau would eventually find the path to stability,” said the Deputy Special Representative, adding that “hope is still alive.”

UN atomic energy agency receives documents from Iran on nuclear programme

17 August - The United Nations Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has received from Iran information on its nuclear activities in accordance with an agreement signed between the two parties in order for the watchdog agency to assess possible military dimensions of the programme by year’s end.

“Iran provided the IAEA with its explanation in writing and related documents as agreed in the Road-map for the clarification of past and present outstanding issues regarding Iran’s nuclear programme, concluded between the IAEA and the Islamic Republic of Iran on 14 July 2015,” IAEA announced over the weekend.

The IAEA was asked to monitor and verify the nuclear-related measures set out in the landmark agreement reached in mid-July between international negotiators and the Government of Iran.

The so-called road-map sets out a process, under the November 2013 Framework for Cooperation, to enable IAEA, with the cooperation of Iran, to make an assessment of issues relating to possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme by the end of 2015, according to the agency.

Specifically, it sets out a clear sequence of activities over the coming months, including the provision by Iran of explanations regarding outstanding issues. It provides for technical expert meetings, technical measures and discussions, as well as a separate arrangement regarding the issue of the Parchin military site.

At the time of the July signing, IAEA Director-General Yukiya Amano said the roadmap “should enable me to issue a report setting out the Agency’s final assessment of possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme, for the action of the IAEA Board of Governors, by 15 December 2015.”

The IAEA had said at the time, that the “implementation of this Road-map will provide an important opportunity to resolve the outstanding issues related to Iran’s nuclear programme.”
No new Ebola cases reported in Sierra Leone in past week for first time since outbreak – UN

17 August - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) announced today that no new Ebola cases were reported during the most recent reporting period in Sierra Leone for the first time since the beginning of the outbreak in West Africa, thanks to strong community involvement and the thorough work of rapid response teams.

“This is very good news but we have to keep doing this intensive working with communities to identify potential new cases early and to rapidly stop any Ebola virus transmission,” said WHO Representative in Sierra Leone, Dr. Anders Nordstrom.

According to the UN health agency, Sierra Leone is now down to a single chain of transmission, which started in Freetown but sparked a cluster of cases in the district of Tonkolili in the northern region of the country.

Although Tonkolili had not seen a case of Ebola for more than 150 days, WHO said the Government, WHO and other UN and international partners sent a rapid response team into the district and worked with the village chief and village taskforce to identify and monitor everyone who had been in contact with the virus.

“An epidemiological week has now passed with no new Ebola cases for the first time since the beginning of the outbreak,” according to WHO, which issues weekly updates on the Ebola outbreak, which has killed more than 11,000 people mostly in the hardest-hit countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

WHO said effectively tracking chains of transmission means finding every person who has been in contact with someone proven to be infected with Ebola, monitoring them closely for symptoms for 21 days and rapidly moving them to a treatment centre if they develop symptoms of potential Ebola.

Meanwhile, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has announced that it and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have kick-started a project to reintegrate volunteer workers who have been on the front line fighting the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone but have faced stigmatisation and endured huge psychological stress.

The project will receive $1.9 million, initially to help 800 first responders with vocational training and reintegrating them back into their communities.

UNDP Director for Sierra Leone Sudipto Mukerjee said this was a historic initiative for Ebola recovery and urged communities “to embrace these young people as heroes.”

UNDP is working together with other agencies to get the number of Ebola cases down to zero, as well as helping the government of Sierra Leone develop a national recovery strategy to rebuild the livelihoods of those most affected and strengthen the government’s capacity to restore essential services.
Mali: UN mission condemns violations of ceasefire in Kidal region

17 August - Fighting erupted over the weekend in northern Mali’s Kidal region between armed groups, breaking the ceasefire and prompting the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the country, known as MINUSMA, to issue a firm condemnation.

“Pending the conclusions of the investigation team today dispatched to Anefis, MINUSMA condemns in the strongest terms these acts, perpetrated in blatant violation of ceasefire agreements and of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali”, to which both rival groups – the National Movement for Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) and the Plateform Coalition – are signatories.

Fighting resumed on August 15 in the town of Touzek Oued, located at the south-east of Kidal and between Tabankort and Anefis, also in the North Mali, points out a press release.

“The international community, as well as the population, is concerned by the increasing number of these violations, which could hinder the progress made towards a stable and lasting peace in Mali.”

MINUSMA reminded the parties that they will have to answer for their actions before the Security Council, which, on 29 June, said that it would consider targeted sanctions against those who obstruct or threaten the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

Urging the armed groups to immediately cease fighting, the Mission, adds the statement, stresses that it will not hesitate to take “all necessary measures” to protect civilians, in accordance to its mandate and rules of engagement.

UN chief condemns terrorist attack in eastern province of Pakistan

17 August - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned the bomb attack today in District Attock, in Pakistan’s Punjab Province, and was saddened to learn that the attack had killed more than a dozen people, including Punjab's Home Minister, Shuja Khanzada, and injured many others.

“Nothing justifies terrorism,” the Secretary-General reiterated in a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York, and also expressed hope that the perpetrators would be brought to justice swiftly.

Mr. Ban extended his condolences to the families of the victims and wished the injured a speedy recovery. He also offered his sympathies to the people and Government of Pakistan.
‘Horrified’ by immense human suffering in Syria, UN relief chief urges all parties to protect civilians

17 August - Horrified by the "total disrespect" for civilian life in Syria, as evidenced by yesterday's airstrikes on a market in Douma, the top United Nations humanitarian official today warned that the protracted conflict in the country not only severely affects the lives of millions of people, but also threatens the stability of the entire region and beyond.

“In Homs, I saw with my own eyes inestimable human suffering. In the Old City, I saw the complete destruction of almost every home, beyond which lies the destruction of lives. Behind every window of every destroyed home, we must remember that there were people whose lives have been shattered, like the family of Ahmed who I sat with to hear his harrowing story amid all this violence and destruction,” stated the Under Secretary-General for humanitarian affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, during a press conference.

Wrapping-up a three-day visit to Syria on Monday, during which he assessed the impact of intense fighting on recently returned families, Mr. O'Brien reminded journalists that civilians have borne the brunt of this conflict for over four years now, with 220,000 people killed, more than a million injured and almost half of the population displaced.

“Attacks on civilians are unlawful, unacceptable and must stop. I am particularly appalled about reports of yesterday's airstrikes, causing scores of civilian deaths and hundreds injured, right in the centre of Douma, a besieged part of Damascus. I am horrified by the total disrespect for civilian life in this conflict and appeal to each and every party…to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law,” the Under Secretary-General continued.

These attacks, which targeted a market place, were also vigorously condemned by the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura.

“The Government's bombing of yesterday is devastating. Attacks on civilian areas with aerial indiscriminate bombs, such as vacuum bombs, are prohibited under international law. Hitting crowded civilian markets and killing almost one hundred of its own citizens by a government is unacceptable in any circumstances,” Mr. de Mistura declared.

Furthermore, due to cuts by non-State armed groups, at least five million people in Damascus have been without water for the past three days, the third time this year they have undergone this suffering. In Aleppo, two million people have also been deprived of their water supply for 17 days, while 300,000 people in Dar'a and surrounding villages have endured water cuts seven times this year.

“It is unacceptable for those engaged in conflict to use access to water and other services as a weapon of war,” stressed Stephen O'Brien.

However, the Relief Coordinator said he had constructive discussions with government officials on ways to strengthen aid operations, hoping that concrete steps would now be taken.

“The United Nations and our partners are providing assistance to millions of Syrians in need, including by crossing conflict lines and international borders. However, I remain extremely concerned for the welfare of the 4.6 million people stuck in hard-to-reach and besieged areas,” Mr. O'Brien emphasized. “Freedom of movement for all people trying to flee the violence and conflict must be ensured by all parties.”

Expressing deep concern about the lack of funding for humanitarian operations in Syria and the region, which are less than 30 percent funded, the Under Secretary-General called on the international community to step up to the appeal for resources to fund the essential life-saving and protection work needed across Syria urgently.
Central African Republic: meeting reported victim of sexual assault, UNICEF provides 'every possible help'

16 August - Staff from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have met with a young girl in the Central African Republic reportedly raped by a UN police officer, the head of the agency has announced, explaining that UNICEF is providing her with “every possible help,” including medical assistance and support to deal with the psychological impact of the ordeal.

“Our UNICEF colleagues in the Central African Republic (CAR) met with the young girl reportedly raped by a UN police officer,” said a press statement issued yesterday by UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake, which added that while respecting the integrity of the investigation into the incident, “it is clear that this child has endured a most brutal ordeal.”

The announcement follows a flurry of action at the highest levels of the United Nations after the allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation were revealed early last week by the human rights group Amnesty International concerning actions by UN peacekeepers serving with the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

In the wake of the revelations, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon vowed decisive action and immediately announced that he had accepted the resignation of MINUSCA chief Babacar Gaye, scheduled an urgent meeting with the heads of all United Nations peace operations and Force Commanders, as well as a special closed-door session of the Security Council on the matter.

Mr. Ban told Council members of his “distress and shame over reports of sexual exploitation and the abuse of power by UN forces, police or civilian personnel.” He said: “Even a single allegation represents a serious strike at our institution…we must also bear in mind the profound damage done to credibly carry out the mandates entrusted to us by this very Council.”

The UN chief voiced his frustration with what he described as “far too lenient sanctions for such grave acts affecting men, women and, all too often, children” and stated that the failure to pursue criminal accountability for sexual crimes was “tantamount to impunity.”

“Let us pledge to do more – much more – together to protect civilians and uphold the values of the United Nations,” the Secretary-General said.

In yesterday's statement, Mr. Lake said UNICEF in CAR is offering the reported victim, and her family, “every possible help – including medical assistance, support to deal with the psychological impact of the assault, and legal advice.

“Our hope is that the process of healing for this young girl can now begin. It is also important that she is afforded absolute privacy so she does not suffer any further distress,” the UNICEF chief concluded.
UN mission condemns ISIL attacks in Sirte, urges Libyans to unite against terrorism

15 August - Strongly condemning attacks in Sirte by the so-called Islamic State (Daesh), the United Nations Support Mission in Libya stressed today it is “high time” that Libyans agree a unity government to address the country's challenges and “join together to confront the scourge” of the group, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL.

In a statement the UN Mission, known as UNSMIL, deplored the attacks in the coastal city of Sirte, including reports of indiscriminate shelling of residential neighbourhoods and the killing of captives the terrorist group has controlled since May.

“At a time when Libyan key political stakeholders gathered in Geneva for a dialogue to resolve the country's crisis and send a strong message of unity, the terrorist group once again struck to impose its reign of terror” said the statement.

The latest round of UN-sponsored political talks just wrapped up in the Swiss city and UNSMIL has reported that the participants “reiterated their conviction that there can be no alternative to peace in Libya outside this dialogue process, which sets the framework for a comprehensive political settlement that is achieved through consensus.”

According to news reports, the latest spate of violence in Sirte erupted this past Tuesday and has continued throughout the week, leaving dozens of casualties.

Warning “time and again” of the growing danger of Daesh and the threat the group poses to the country's unity as well as to all Libyans irrespective of their affiliation, UNSMIL stressed that it is “high time that Libyans set aside their differences and join together to confront the scourge of Daesh.

While UNSMIL noted Libyan calls for swift action to save Sirte and its people from Da'esh's hold and prevent atrocities, the Mission urged the Libyan stakeholders to urgently finalize a political agreement and establish a Government of National Accord that, in partnership with the international community, can address the threat of Daesh and other challenges facing the country.

“Terrorism is becoming a regional threat, with a reach surpassing national borders and causing so much suffering to the people,” said the Mission, condemning all acts of terrorism, including the recent abduction and murder of a Croatian national in Egypt.