Refugees should not be turned into scapegoats following Paris attacks, says UN agency

17 November - The United Nations refugee agency today expressed its shock and horror at the attacks in Paris and the killing of so many innocent people but warned against the scapegoating of refugees, in the wake of the deadly attacks.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), António Guterres conveyed his solidarity with the Government and the people of France, as he did with the Government of Lebanon, following the recent Beirut attacks.

“We are deeply disturbed by language that demonizes refugees as a group. This is dangerous as it will contribute to xenophobia and fear. The security problems Europe faces are highly complex. Refugees should not be turned into scapegoats and must not become the secondary victims of these most tragic events,” said Melissa Fleming, UNHCR spokesperson at today’s Palais des Nations press briefing in Geneva.

Ms. Fleming cautioned against the reactions of some Member States to end the programs being put in place, backtracking from commitments made to manage the refugee crisis, such as relocation, or proposing the erection of more barriers.

At the same time, she also expressed concern by the yet unconfirmed news that one of the Paris attackers may have entered Europe as part of the current influx of refugees and migrants.
“We strongly believe in the importance of preserving the integrity of the asylum system. Asylum and terrorism are not compatible with each other,” said Ms. Fleming adding that the 1951 Refugee Convention excludes from its scope people who have committed serious crimes.

Ms. Fleming emphasized that the overwhelming majority of those coming to Europe are fleeing persecution or the life-threatening effects of conflict and are unable to reach safety in Europe by alternative avenues.

She also stressed that many people are fleeing from extremism and terrorism “from the very people associated with the Paris attacks.”

The spokesperson also added that precarious conditions in countries of first asylum have also forced many to leave for Europe.

Additionally, Ms. Fleming recalled that Member States were urged to immediately put in place an effective reception, registration and screening mechanism immediately upon arrival of refugees and migrants, adding that eligible asylum-seekers must be provided protection and relocation services under the European Union (EU) plan.

“Relocation and other agreed measures can improve the management and stabilization of current flows of people. These measures include security measures and the proper registration of all those on the move,” Ms. Fleming added.

Further she said highlighted the urgent need to significantly “expand legal avenues, notably resettlement and humanitarian admission programs, as alternatives to the dangerous and irregular journeys while cracking down on smugglers.”

Lastly, Ms. Fleming reiterated that the security of societies and ensuring the integrity of asylum in Europe are objectives that are not incompatible and stressed that they are central to maintaining European core values and protecting the right to seek asylum.

**Myanmar: Ban phones election victor, pledging continued UN support for democratic reform**

17 November - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today phoned Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of Myanmar’s National League for Democracy (NLD), to congratulate her on its resounding success in this month’s elections, pledging continued United Nations support for democratic reform efforts.

He warmly noted that her dedication and perseverance in the path of democratic transformation was finally bearing fruit, highlighting the elections as a defining moment in the reform process that has opened up real potential for Myanmar to thrive as an inclusive, harmonious multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy, according to a UN readout on the call.

Mr. Ban stressed that cooperation and inclusive dialogue involving all stakeholders, including those representing ethnic groups, religious minorities as well as civil society, was essential.

He underlined that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s appeal to her supporters for a calm and peaceful electoral process as well as for a dignified acceptance of its results, is evidence of her vision and statesmanship.

As a friend of Myanmar, he said the UN would continue to support democratic reform efforts and remain a steady partner as it faces its future challenges.

Mr. Ban had already issued a statement last week acknowledging the courage and vision of President Thein Sein “whose leadership in the reform process has helped achieve progress to this defining stage.”
The UN has long been involved in Myanmar’s transition after more than 50 years of military rule, appointing a Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the issue. In 2007 Mr. Ban set up the “Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Myanmar,” a consultative forum of 14 countries to assist him in his efforts to spur change in the South-East Asian nation.

Over the years, he has welcomed the release of political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi herself. In 2010 he voiced concern over the decision to dissolve 10 political parties, including the NLD, ahead of the previous elections that November.

**UN calls on countries to protect health from impacts of climate change**

**17 November** - With the United Nations climate conference (COP21) starting in Paris in less than two weeks away, the World Health Organization (WHO) today underlined that climate change is already causing tens of thousands of deaths every year, and called on countries to take strong actions to address the issue.

The UN health agency is attributing these deaths to shifting patterns of disease from extreme weather events – such as heat-waves and floods – and from the degradation of air quality, food and water supplies, and sanitation.

“The upcoming United Nations climate change conference (COP21) in Paris offers the world an important opportunity to not only reach a strong international climate agreement, but also to protect the health of current and future generations,” WHO stressed in a press release, adding that the agreement would have the potential to save lives worldwide.

In 2012, the agency estimated 7 million people died from air pollution-related diseases, making it the world’s largest single environmental health risk. It is predicted that climate change will cause an additional 25 000 deaths per year from malaria, diarrhoea, heat stress and under-nutrition between 2030 and 2050. Children, women and the poor in lower income countries will reportedly be the most vulnerable and most affected, widening health gaps.

Highlighting that not only are ways to combat climate change already known and well-documented, WHO said they can bring important health gains. As its new series of climate change and health country profiles illustrate, investments in low-carbon development, clean renewable energy, and strengthening climate resilience, are also investments in health.

“Implementing proven interventions to reduce emissions of short-lived climate pollutants, like black carbon and methane, for example achieving higher vehicle emissions and efficiency standards, would be expected to save approximately 2.4 million lives a year and reduce global warming by about 0.5°C by 2050,” the agency reported.

In addition, placing a price on polluting fuels to compensate their negative health impacts would be expected to cut outdoor air pollution deaths by half, reduce carbon dioxide emissions by more than 20 per cent, and raise approximately US$ 3 trillion per year in revenue – over half the total value of health spending by all of the world’s governments.

WHO is also insisting that strengthening health resilience to climate risks, including measures such as early-warning systems for more frequent and severe heatwaves, and protection of water, sanitation, and hygiene services against floods and droughts, would ensure that recent progress against climate-sensitive diseases, is not slowed or reversed.

“Nevertheless, the profound consequences for health are still not given sufficient attention in debates about climate change,” it warned.

In preparation for COP21, formally the 21st Meeting of the States Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), WHO indicated that countries have made important commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions and scale up adaptation to climate change, but more needs to be done.

“If countries take strong actions to address climate change, while protecting and promoting health, they will collectively...
bring about a planet that is not only more environmentally intact, but also has cleaner air, more abundant and safer freshwater and food, more effective and fairer health and social protection systems – and as a result, healthier people,” the press release concluded.

It further highlighted that the conference “is the time for the health community to lend their voice to the international climate discussion and ask countries to come together and make bold commitments to protect our planet and the health of current and future generations.”

**Governments, tech companies commit to protecting children from online sexual exploitation – UNICEF**

**17 November** - At the #WeProtect Children Online Global Summit hosted by the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom in Abu Dhabi, leading information technology companies, governments and international organizations today pledged to protect millions of children from online sexual exploitation, said the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

“Children make up one-third of all Internet users globally. With the rapid expansion of communication technologies shrinking the digital divide, protecting children online is an urgent global priority,” said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Fatoumata Ndiaye in a news release.

According to UNICEF, governments in every region of the world have agreed to establish coordinated national responses between criminal justice systems, law enforcement agencies, frontline social service providers and education sectors to better protect children online.

The 17 countries in the UNICEF Global Programme to protect children from online sexual exploitation of children are; Albania, Algeria, Brazil, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, India, Jordan, Kenya, Madagascar, Montenegro, Namibia, Paraguay, the Philippines, Serbia, Uganda, Viet Nam.

Additionally, leading technology companies including Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter and Yahoo have also pledged to keep children safe by developing new technology, tools and expertise, UNICEF said.

“Today’s commitments indicate strong political will from every region of the world and we encourage more countries to join this important global movement,” said Ms. Ndiaye.

According to UNICEF, there are high levels of sexual exploitation of children online and an average of five child victims of online sexual abuse are identified by Interpol and police partners every day.

Further, UNICEF research revealed that the number of webpages containing child sexual abuse material grew by 147 per cent from 2012 to 2014, with girls and children 10 years old or younger depicted in 80 per cent of these materials.

UNICEF said that at the first #WeProtect event last year, the United Kingdom Government pledged £50 million (approximately USD 71 million) to establish a Global Fund to End Violence against Children and an initial £10 million (USD 15 million) is supporting UNICEF’s ground-breaking global programme to protect children from online sexual exploitation in 17 countries and 6 regions around the world.

Since the commencement of the programme, progress has been made in several countries such as dismantling two networks that produced online child sexual abuse materials in Guatemala, undertaking a national study on online child protection in Philippines and establishment of a police unit on online crimes against children in Jordan.

“What happens in the online world is a reflection of society at large, as the dangers children face online are mirrored in the risks children face in their homes, schools and communities,” says Ms. Ndiaye.
Lastly, she stressed that protecting children online is a part of a growing global movement to keep children safe from violence, abuse and exploitation both virtually and physically.

**In shadow of Beirut and Paris terror attacks, UN Security Council discusses root causes of conflict**

**17 November** - The United Nations Security Council held an already scheduled debate on conflict prevention today amid added urgency fuelled by last week’s terrorist attacks in Beirut and Paris, with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressing that counter-terrorism must also tackle such root causes as bad governance, injustice and exclusion.

“Today’s violent conflicts and violent extremism are often rooted in a mix of exclusion, inequality, mismanagement of natural resources, corruption, oppression, governance failures, and the frustration and alienation that accompany a lack of jobs and opportunities,” he said at the opening of the Council’s day-long debate on ‘Security, development and the root causes of conflicts.’

‘Yet our responses have not caught up to these realities. We are not yet properly integrating United Nations action across the inter-dependent pillars of our work: peace, development and human rights,” he added, calling for a global recovery plan for the Middle East similar to the multi-billion dollar Marshall Plan with which the United States rebuilt Western Europe after World War Two.

Turning to the most recent terrorist attacks in Paris, Beirut and Baghdad, last month’s apparent bombing of a Russian plane over Egypt, and the mounting threat from Da’esh [also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL], which controls large swathes of Syria and Iraq, Mr. Ban warned against taking reprisals against Muslims.

“No grievance or cause can justify such acts,” he said of the terrorist attacks. But, he added: “I am especially concerned about reprisals or further discrimination against Muslims, in particular Muslim refugees and migrants. This would just exacerbate the alienation on which terrorists feed.”

He laid out four principles for preventing conflict and terrorism, stressing the crucial importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for achieving peaceful and inclusive societies that provide access to justice and build accountable institutions.

First, he said, well-targeted development assistance is needed to address risk factors such as inequality and marginalization, and is especially critical when societies are emerging from conflict and risk lapsing back into it.

Secondly, heightened prevention means a sharper focus on human rights, violations of which are often the best early warning signs of trouble, embodied in the Human Rights up Front initiative.

This requires three types of change within the UN system: cultural change, to ensure staff recognize prevention as a core responsibility; operational change to deploy teams to assist national authorities before crises emerge; and earlier and more transparent engagement with national authorities and other Member States on deteriorating situations.

Thirdly, greater coherence is needed among all actors, with the UN system pooling its strengths to bring strong analysis to the Security Council and UN Peacebuilding Commission.

Finally, adequate, predictable financing is vital for UN mediation work, Country Teams, and the UN Peacebuilding Fund.

“We also need to be bold when necessary – for example in rebuilding Syria and supporting the countries generously hosting large numbers of refugees, including Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey,” Mr. Ban concluded.

“There is a growing global call for a recovery plan for the region perhaps akin to the Marshall Plan in scale. I urge you to give this idea due consideration when the day arrives, as I know we hope it will soon.
The human costs of our failures can be seen in all-too-many places. The suffering and setbacks weigh heavily on my conscience, as they should on yours. At the same time, we have the tools with which to do better. Let us use them.”

Peacebuilding Commission Chairperson Olof Skoog, of Sweden, also set out “three shifts” needed to prevent a lapse or relapse into conflict.

First, one of the most effective ways to sustain peace is by building national capacity, strengthening domestic institutions and supporting good governance and standard 3-5 years programme cycles in this field should be expanded to a 15-30 year framework.

Secondly, inclusive national ownership is crucial to the process. “We cannot address inclusivity without mentioning the importance of including women as actors in all aspects of our work,” Mr. Skoog stressed.

Finally, greater collaboration is essential and “short-sighted turf wars” must be avoided. “Responding to challenges of conflict and post-conflict countries demand of all of us to do more and better within our respective mandates,” he said. “But above all, in order to effectively address root causes of conflict, international actors need to start acting more coherently.”

**Biodegradable plastics are not the answer to reducing marine litter, says UN**

**17 November** - Widespread adoption of products labelled “biodegradable” will not significantly decrease the volume of plastic entering the ocean or the physical and chemical risks that plastics pose to marine environment, accord to a United Nations report released today.

The report, entitled Biodegradable Plastics and Marine Litter. Misconceptions, Concerns and Impacts on Marine Environments, finds that complete biodegradation of plastics occurs in conditions that are rarely, if ever, met in marine environments, with some polymers requiring industrial composters and prolonged temperatures of above 50°C to disintegrate. There is also limited evidence suggesting that labelling products as “biodegradable” increases the public's inclination to litter.

Its launch marks the 20th anniversary of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA), an intergovernmental mechanism hosted by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

“Recent estimates from UNEP have shown as much as 20 million tonnes of plastic end up in the world’s oceans each year,” said UNEP’s Executive Director Achim Steiner in a press release.

“Once in the ocean, plastic does not go away, but breaks down into microplastic particles. This report shows there are no quick fixes, and a more responsible approach to managing the lifecycle of plastics will be needed to reduce their impacts on our oceans and ecosystems.”

In 2014, a study by UNEP and partners estimated that about 280 million tonnes of plastic is produced globally each year and only a very small percentage is recycled. Instead, some of that plastic ends up in the world's oceans, costing several billion dollars annually in environmental damage to marine ecosystems.

In recent years, concern has reportedly grown over microplastics, which are particles up to five millimetres in diameter, either manufactured or created when plastic breaks down. Their ingestion has been widely reported in marine organisms, including seabirds, fish, mussels, worms and zooplankton.

The new report aimed to verify a thesis that plastics considered “biodegradable” may play an important role in reducing these negative environmental impacts.

It finds that plastics most commonly used for general applications, such as polyethylene (PE), polypropylene (PP) and
Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) are not biodegradable in marine environments. Polymers, which biodegrade under favourable conditions on land, are much slower to break up in the ocean and their widespread adoption is likely to contribute to marine litter and consequent undesirable consequences for marine ecosystems.

The study also analyzes the environmental impacts of oxo-degradable plastics, enriched with a pro oxidant, such as manganese, which precipitates their fragmentation. It found that in marine environments the fragmentation is fairly slow and can take up to 5 years, during which the plastic objects continue to litter the ocean.

According to UNEP, oxo-degradable plastics can pose a threat to marine ecosystems even after fragmentation. The report says it should be assumed that microplastics created in the fragmentation process remain in the ocean, where they can be ingested by marine organisms and facilitate the transport of harmful microbes, pathogens and algal species.

The report also cites research that suggested some people are attracted by “technological solutions” as an alternative to changing behaviour. Labelling a product as biodegradable may be seen as a technical fix that removes responsibility from the individual, resulting in a reluctance to take action.

**Drought in Botswana is learning opportunity to achieve water security – UN rights expert**

17 November - A United Nations human rights expert today urged Botswana to take the current extreme drought in the southern African country as an opportunity to develop a strategy for providing access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all as “a short-cut to prevent illnesses and deaths” in the long run.

“The current drought should not be considered as a sporadic event, but rather as a driver for acquiring water security as a national priority,” said Léo Heller, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to safe drinking water and sanitation at the end of a nine-day official visit to Botswana.

“A strategic and participatory process, oriented to the provision of water and sanitation for all, will be a short-cut to prevent illnesses and deaths related to water-borne diseases and economic losses,” Mr. Heller said.

Botswana has been going through one of the worst droughts in its history with a significant part of the population facing a severe water shortage.

“Such a measure hits the poor and the vulnerable hardest,” Mr. Heller said, noting that the situation raises serious human rights concerns of water quality, water quantity and related health impacts.

“As water stress in Botswana is predicted to get higher and higher due to the impact of climate change and increasing water demand, the Government must establish measures in order to prevent severe environmental situations from translating into water shortage, affecting people’s standard of living,” he said, adding that access to safe drinking water and sanitation is one of the most important obligations of the human rights framework.

Mr. Heller said he “found an alarming level of highly precarious water supply in these villages – in some cases with no public provision at all” and in some cases with the bush as the only solution to most of the people’s physiological needs.

“I was surprised by still a common practice of open defecation in villages,” he noted.

In one community, he said, women and girls need to fetch water from a river, located not less than 1 kilometre from the household and consume an average of 20 litres of brown river water per person per day without boiling because they cannot afford or have access to fuel.

“The Government of Botswana is at a critical moment to translate its commitment to prioritize access to sanitation and safe drinking water for personal and domestic uses into full implementation. I am confident that the Government, who is making
progresses in this regard, has the capacity to make the human rights to water and sanitation a reality for everyone in the
country,” Mr. Heller concluded.

Mr. Heller was appointed by the Human Rights Council in November 2014 and as an independent human rights expert
appointed to address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world, he is not UN staff and does
not receive a salary for their work.

Central African Republic: UN relief coordinator strongly
condemns attacks on sites for internally displaced

17 November - The top UN relief official in the Central African Republic (CAR) has
condemned repeated and deadly attacks that took place last week on sites for internally
displaced people (IDPs) in the towns of Batangafo and Bambari.

The sudden eruption of inter communal violence in Batangafo, Ouham Province last
Tuesday left at least 10 people killed and several injured. Over 730 shelters were burned in
the IDP site hosting over 30,000 people, which is currently the largest site in the country.

Meanwhile in Bambari, Ouaka Province, the renewed violence left three people killed,
more than 30 injured and newly displaced people.

“I condemn all attacks causing deaths and injuries among the civilian population, and
remind all parties involved that the indiscriminate attack against civilians is a war crime,”
said Aurélien Agbénouenli, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the country, in a press release.

“The parties involved in the clashes must respect the inalienable rights of men, women and children to life. Civilians should
not be targeted,” he added.

The fresh clashes in Batangafo reportedly forced thousands of people to flee towards the international non-governmental
organizations, the compound of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) as well as
some public buildings.

According to the UN, the spiral of violence is also causing additional humanitarian needs in the country, and the increasing
insecurity is rendering the work of humanitarian actors even more challenging.

Mr. Agbénouenli stressed that despite the rising challenges, humanitarian workers are committed to stay and deliver live-
saving assistance, including the provision of medical care, water and sanitation, and the distribution of non-food and food
items.

“It is urgent that international laws and conventions are respected and that all parties to the conflict take immediate action
and responsibility to respect the humanitarian space and secure the rights of the civilian population of the Central African
Republic, who are among the most vulnerable people in the world. We need to end all this suffering that is unacceptable,” he
stated.

Until the recent violence, the UN estimates CAR had an internally displaced population estimated at 399,000 people, while
almost 460,000 had fled to neighboring countries.
UN-backed conference adopts measures to tackle threats to migratory waterbirds

17 November - With many of the world’s migratory waterbirds under heightened threat due to human activities and climate change, a United Nations Environment Programme-supported conference has adopted action plans to tackle various dangers those vulnerable species face and provide guidance on their sustainable use.

The 6th Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds, which is administered by the UN Environment Programed (UNEP) and which wrapped up this past weekend in Bonn, addressed the challenges of migratory waterbirds such as storks, ducks, geese and the African Penguin, which are especially vulnerable along their often long migration routes across Africa and Eurasia.

“[The Agreement] forms a bridge between Eurasia and Africa, which is indispensable for the conservation of transcontinental migrants,” Jacques Trouvilliez, Executive Secretary of Agreement, said in a news release, adding that “actions are based not only on the best scientific expertise but also on reconciling human well-being with biodiversity conservation.”

For the first time in Agreement's history, it has adopted an action plan for nine species of seabirds, involving Angola, Namibia and South Africa. Action plans for six priority species have also been adopted. The endangered Ugandan Grey Crowned Crane, among which, has suffered a 4/5 decline in the past half century.

As a result, countries have agreed to launch and complement a network of marine protected areas, pledged to support the outcomes of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA1) on marine debris, and of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) to comply with regulations to protect seabirds.

Six priority species, facing some common threats caused by illegal hunting and wildlife trade, habitat loss, ocean pollution, with half of them only occur in Africa, have also been highlighted in the conference and reflected in the target plans.

One action plan specifically aims to reverse these endangered populations decline by reducing the mortality rate of adult birds and increasing breeding success.

Applauding the resolutions, one African delegate said that these actions “link to improving the livelihoods of people,” with another African expert stressing that “seabirds are sentinels of ocean health and some are signalling distress.”

The Bonn meeting further discussed the impact of renewable energy on waterbirds and noted its harm to migratory waterbirds, if not properly installed. Windfarms and hydropower plants located along major migration routes, for example, can have lethal effects.

Bycatch and depletion of prey through fisheries, invasive land species, ingestion of microplastics, climate change, among others, are main threats to the seabirds, according to the news release.

The 6th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA MOP6) was held from 9 to 14 November 2015 in Bonn, Germany. Over 200 delegates from party states, observer states, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations attended the conference.

As the only inter-governmental treaty administered by UNEP, AEWA is dedicated to the conservation and sustainable use of migratory waterbirds and their habitats throughout their range. 2015 also marks its 20th Anniversary.
Somalia: senior UN official calls for global support to improve human rights situation

17 November - While noting significant improvement in several sectors in long-troubled Somalia, a senior United Nations official today warned that the country’s progress is “at risk” without increased support from international partners to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights.

“Despite persisting challenges there is a significant improvement in the security situation in Somalia,” UN Assistant Secretary-General for human rights Ivan Šimonović told reporters in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, at the end of a five-day visit to the country.

Mr. Šimonović also observed that meaningful progress has been made by Somalia in its operations against Al Shabaab militia, in the implementation of the Human Rights Road Map, in reforming the justice and security sectors, in the State-building process and the consultations on an electoral model for 2016.

He welcomed the steps undertaken towards the adoption of legislation for a National Human Rights Commission and urged the Parliament to ensure the Commission’s independence and its compliance with the Paris Principles – a set of international standards which frame and guide the work of National Human Rights Institutions.

However, Mr. Šimonović stressed that Somalia continues to face a “series of human rights challenges,” such as the recent allegations of serious human rights violations committed during military operations.

He called on the Government and all security forces operating in the country, including the Somali National Army, African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and other forces to take measures to prevent and address violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

“Violations of international human rights and humanitarian law affect the reputation and credibility of security forces. Such violations also alienate the population they are expected to protect, and therefore negatively affect the ultimate success in the fight against terrorism,” said Mr. Šimonović.

Further, he recalled that UN entities are bound by a Human Rights Due Diligence Policy according to which the support they provide to national and international security forces must be based on compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

Upon visiting a centre for disengaged Al Shabaab combatants in Baidoa, Mr. Šimonović stressed that terrorism cannot be overcome only by military operations and stressed the urgent need to address the root cause of terrorism, including poverty, corruption and lack of good governance, unemployment, social exclusion and marginalization.

It is important to strengthen democratic space with a free and strong civil society, gender equality and the promotion and protection of fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and association, as well as inclusivity in the ongoing national consultative process and sustained mainstreaming of human rights in the State-building process,” he added.

Mr. Šimonović also expressed his outrage at yesterday’s killing of civilians seeking humanitarian aid and stressed that perpetrators must be identified and punished.

“People receiving assistance are vulnerable. Access to humanitarian aid should benefit from a special level of protection. I call on national authorities to take the necessary security measures to ensure protection of this access,” he concluded.
Access to higher education doesn’t always lead to lower unemployment – UN labour agency

17 November - Workers with post-secondary education are more likely to be unemployed in lower-income countries, reflecting a “mismatch” between skilled persons and the number of available jobs matching their competencies and expectations, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The 9th edition of the ILO’s Key Indicators of the Labour Market, released Monday, said the educational level of the labour force is improving worldwide but access to a higher education is not leading to lower unemployment at the global level.

“This reflects a mismatch between skilled persons and the number of available jobs matching their competencies and expectations, and unless addressed may work to put a limit on economic growth and development,” according to Rosina Gammarano, from the ILO Department of Statistics.

According to the report, which is part of the broader ILO statistical database, all but two of 64 countries with available data have registered an increase in the share of the labour force with a tertiary education over the past 15 years.

The biggest increases were seen in Canada, Luxembourg and Russia, it said.

At the same time, the report said, there has been a drop in the share of labour market participants with only a primary-level education or less.

But workers with secondary-level education do not automatically have a better chance of finding a job.

“While they are less likely to be unemployed in most high-income economies, tertiary graduates in low- and lower-middle-income economies are actually more likely to be among the unemployed than workers with lower educational levels,” it said.

The report also provides data on the share of youth who are not in education, employment or training, one of the proposed indicators that will be used for monitoring the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Other key findings:

- The median unemployment rate across 112 countries with comparable unemployment rate data increased from 6.4 per cent in 2007 to 7.2 per cent in 2014.
- The average worker in a high-income country currently produces 62 times the annual output of an average worker in a low-income economy and 10 times that of an average worker in a middle-income economy.
- However, middle-income economies have registered the fastest productivity growth over the past 15 years.
- Manufacturing employment in high-income economies has declined by 5.2 million since 2000, while it grew by 195 million in middle-income economies.
- As of 2015, 72 per cent of workers in the world are employed in middle-income economies, 20 per cent in high-income economies and 8 per cent in low-income countries.
- The number of working poor (living on less than $2 per person, per day) declined by 479 million between 2000 and 2015. Virtually all of the decline was in middle-income countries.
- The report includes the first-ever estimates of the size of the labour force (employed + unemployed) across different income classifications, making it possible to determine the percentage of workers throughout the world that are in high-income, low-income, lower-middle income and upper-middle income economies.
UN expert denounces Paris attacks as ‘crime against humanity, crime against culture’

17 November - The United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Karima Bennoune, denounced in the strongest possible terms the 13 November terrorist attacks in Paris, saying they may constitute a crime against humanity in which people were targeted “simply for participating in cultural life.”

“These attacks may constitute a crime against humanity and certainly one which viciously and deliberately targeted sites of arts and leisure where people come together to enjoy their cultural rights,” said Ms. Bennoune in a press release.

She noted that in a statement claiming responsibility for the 13 November attacks, the language used by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) – labelling rock fans at the Bataclan theatre “pagans” and the city of Paris the “capital of prostitution and vice” – demonstrated the hateful worldview motivating this violence.

Ms. Bennoune stressed that shouting ‘Allahu Akbar’ (God is Great) at the outset of the Bataclan massacre, as has been reported, “grossly misuses a religious pronouncement sacred to hundreds of millions of Muslim believers around the world who abhor such bloodshed, and increases the likelihood of hate and discrimination against them in response.”

Noting that Dalil Boubakeur, rector of the Grand Mosque in Paris, called for national unity in the face of the terrible ordeal, Ms. Bennoune echoed his words in expressing her “total compassion” for the victims and their families, adding “International unity will likewise be critical in responding to such threats to culture and to those coming together to make and share it.”

“I extend my solidarity and condolences to the people of Paris and hope they will soon experience a return to security as well as to an environment in which they can fully enjoy their rights and freedoms,” the human rights expert said.

Ms. Bennoune also called on the international community to urgently take all steps needed to assist French authorities in ensuring that any perpetrators still at large were brought to justice in accordance with international law.

“We must all cooperate to protect those around the world who face similar attacks from such gangs of death simply for participating in cultural life,” she stated.

The Special Rapporteur appealed to civil society around the world “to unite in exposing and opposing the fundamentalist ideology motivating such atrocities, as many have done in Muslim majority countries for years, and to support those resisting such fundamentalist assaults on cultural life on the frontlines from West Africa to South Asia and beyond.”

She also expressed her deep personal concern about other recent terrorist attacks that raise grave human rights issues largely beyond the scope of her mandate, such as in Beirut on 12 November and the Russian plane crash in Egypt last month.

“I would like to emphasize the global equality of victims and the unavoidably international nature of the struggle against those who seek to deliberately kill civilians and culture itself, and above all to divide the human family,” the UN rights expert concluded.
Cambodia: Ban calls arrest warrant for opposition leader ‘worrisome development’

17 November - For the second time in three weeks the United Nations has expressed concern over increasing tensions between Cambodia’s Government and opposition, with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today calling the arrest warrant issued against opposition leader Sam Rainsy “worrisome.”

In a statement attributable to his spokesperson, Mr. Ban urged the Cambodian People’s Party and the Cambodia National Rescue Party to resume their dialogue and called on all political players to refrain from violence, intimidation and harassment.

“The Secretary-General is following with concern the increasing tensions between the ruling party and the opposition in Cambodia,” the statement said.

“The arrest warrant issued against opposition leader Sam Rainsy on 13 November and earlier incidents against opposition parliamentarians and leaders are worrisome developments,” he added. “A non-threatening environment of democratic dialogue is essential for political stability and a peaceful society.”

On 30 October, the Geneva-based Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) voiced concern over the worsening climate for opposition politicians and activists.

According to OHCHR, 11 opposition activists are serving prison sentences of between seven and 20 years for participating in or leading an “insurrection.” Another opposition Member of Parliament is awaiting trial on charges that include incitement to commit crimes and forging public documents.

“We stress that the right to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression belongs to all individuals, regardless of their political or other opinion,” spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani said.

In what appears to be an organized attack, a group of pro-Government protesters in Phnom Penh, the capital, last month verbally and physically assaulted opposition legislators and threatened the safety of the private residence of the National Assembly’s First Vice-President.

Reports suggested that police and other state security forces looked on while the attacks took place. “It is the Government's responsibility to ensure that individuals are not targeted for their political affiliation or for expressing dissenting views,” Ms. Shamdasani said.