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Security Council moves to cut off all funding sources for ISIL and other terrorist groups

17 December - At its first ever meeting at Finance Ministers’ level, the United Nations Security Council today stepped up its efforts to cut off all sources of funding for the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIL) and other terrorist groups, including ransom payments, no matter by whom.

In a unanimously adopted resolution at a session presided over by Treasury Secretary Jack Lew of the United States, which holds its monthly presidency, the 15-member body called for enhanced actions, from closing financial system loopholes to stopping the abuse of charitable causes, as well as updating the existing Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List.

It stressed that already existing resolutions mandating States to ensure that financial assets are not transferred to terrorists by persons within their territory “shall also apply to the payment of ransoms to individuals, groups, undertakings or entities on the ISIL [Da’esh] and Al-Qaida Sanctions List regardless of how or by whom the ransom is paid.”

The resolution called for increased international cooperation in sharing information and closer collaboration with the private sector to identify suspect transactions.

The Council also called on Member States to promote enhanced vigilance by persons within their jurisdiction to detect any diversion of explosives and raw materials and components that can be used to manufacture improvised explosive devices or...
unconventional weapons, including chemical components, detonators, detonating cord, or poisons.

“They (the terrorists) are agile and have been far too successful in attaining resources for their heinous acts,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the Council at the start of the debate. “As Da’esh (another name for ISIL) and other terrorist groups disseminate their hateful propaganda and ratchet up murderous attacks, we must join forces to prevent them from acquiring and deploying resources to do further harm,” he stressed.

“We know the challenge before us. Terrorists take advantage of weaknesses in financial and regulatory regimes to raise funds. They circumvent formal channels to avoid detection, and exploit new technologies and tools to transfer resources. They have forged destructive and very profitable links with drug and criminal syndicates – among others. And they abuse charitable causes to trick individuals to contribute,” said the UN chief.

He noted that progress has been made over the years in identifying and limiting various methods of terrorist financing, with Member States ratifying the International Convention on the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and adopting legislation to criminalize terrorist financing and strengthen regulatory systems.

“Well, more needs to be done,” Mr. Ban declared. “Terrorists continue to adapt their tactics and diversify their funding sources. Today, Da’esh runs a multi-million dollar economy in territories under its control. Da’esh terrorists raise money through the oil trade, extortion, undetected cash couriers, kidnapping for ransom, trafficking of humans and arms and racketeering.

“They loot and sell precious cultural property, shamelessly profiting from the destruction of humanity’s common heritage. Social media outreach is exploited by Da’esh, not just for radicalization and recruiting, but also for fundraising. Other terrorist organizations around the world – from Boko Haram to Al-Shabaab to the Taliban – are following suit.”

With terrorists increasingly employing elusive tricks to raise and transfer funds, covering their tracks and leaving little evidence to identify tainted resources, the international community must stay ahead of the curve to combat their ploys, he said, noting that many States have yet to set up the necessary legal regimes and institutions to identify and freeze terrorist assets.

Mr. Ban called for increased international cooperation in sharing information and expertise, especially in stopping the illegal trade of cultural artefacts, and closer cooperation with the private and charitable sectors to identify suspected transactions.

**UN welcomes ‘historic’ signing of Libyan Political Agreement**

17 December - Representatives from a broad range of Libyan society today signed a United Nations-brokered agreement on forming a national unity government, a move welcomed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his top envoy for the country as among the “essential building blocks towards a peaceful, secure and prosperous Libya,” but also as “the beginning of a difficult journey” along that path.

“I warmly welcome today’s historic signing of the Libyan Political Agreement by the participants of the Libyan political dialogue,” Mr. Ban said in a statement following the signing that took place in Skhirat, Morocco.

“The agreement will lead to the establishment of a single Government of National Accord and national institutions that will ensure broad representation. It is a critical step in continuing Libya’s post-revolution transition after months of turmoil and uncertainty.”

Mr. Ban said he is hopeful the signing of the agreement will put Libya back on the path of building a democratic State based on the principles of inclusion, human rights and the rule of law. “The door will remain open to those who wish to join on the road to peace. We will continue to work to broaden the basis of support for the new Government,” he added.

Martin Kobler, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL),
also hailed today as “an historic day” for the North African nation.

He said in a statement that “after a period of political divisions and conflict, Libya is restarting its political transition” with the agreement that “puts in place a single set of legitimate institutions – essential building blocks towards a peaceful, secure and prosperous Libya.”

He noted that participating in the signing were representatives of a broad range of Libyan society including members of the House of Representatives and the General National Congress, as well as important public figures from Libyan political parties, civil society, municipalities and women groups.

At the same time, the envoy cautioned that: “We must not forget that this is the beginning of a difficult journey.”

“There is a critical need for national reconciliation and an inclusive national security dialogue,” he added. “Urgent solutions must be found to bolster the Libyan-led fight against terrorism and in particular the threat of Da’esh [also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL].”

He also noted that the “dire humanitarian situation in Benghazi and other areas needs to be addressed as a matter of highest priority, including through the establishment of a dedicated reconstruction fund for Benghazi.”

More than 2.4 million people require immediate humanitarian assistance, of which 435,000 are estimated to be internally displaced, according to the UN.

Libya has been plagued by factional fighting since the 2011 revolution, with the situation continuing to deteriorate in recent months amid significant political fragmentation and violence.

Following broad consultations throughout the year facilitated by the Secretary-General’s former Special Representative for Libya, Bernardino León, it was announced in mid-October that a national unity government could be proposed. The names of candidates for the government's top council were put forward but at that time, the deal stalled when some parties failed to sign off.

**Ban vows to act quickly after report finds UN failed to respond ‘meaningfully’ to Central African Republic abuse allegations**

17 December - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today pledged to urgently review the recommendations made by an independent panel that found that the United Nations did not act with the “speed, care or sensitivity required,” when it uncovered information about crimes committed against children by soldiers – not under UN command – sent to the Central African Republic (CAR) to protect civilians.


The review panel, chaired by Marie Deschamps, a former Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, was set up by the Secretary-General in June to examine the UN response to the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of children by foreign military forces not under UN command and assess the adequacy of the procedures in place.

In the spring of 2014, allegations came to light that international troops serving as peacekeepers in CAR had sexually abused a number of young children in exchange for food or money. The alleged perpetrators were largely from a French military force known as Sangaris, which was operating under authorization of the Security Council but not under UN command.

“I express my profound regret that these children were betrayed by the very people sent to protect them,” said Mr. Ban.
“Though the soldiers who committed the abuses were not under United Nations command, the Report shows that the United Nations, which uncovered the abuse, did not subsequently handle the case with the speed, care or sensitivity required.”

The Report found that three UN officials abused their authority: the then head of the human rights component of the UN mission in CAR (MINUSCA); the then Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of MINUSCA; and the then Under-Secretary-General for the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). Given the gravity of these findings, Mr. Ban said he will act quickly to determine what action might be necessary.

“To uphold the fundamental principle of accountability, and in the light of the history of allegations of sexual abuse by troops in the Central African Republic, including the current allegations, I had previously asked one of them – my Special Representative for the Central African Republic – to resign,” he stated, referring to Lieutenant General Babacar Gaye.

The Report also found that, while there were some shortcomings in the performance of several other UN officials and offices, they had not abused their authority.

“I believe that missteps by these individuals were largely a product of flawed systems. I intend to study these cases further to ensure that all individuals and offices heed the lessons of this review.”

According to its Chair, the panel found that, within the UN, responding to allegations of sexual violence is the responsibility of many but of no one in particular, resulting in a situation where documents “pass from inbox to inbox” and everyone thinks that someone else will take responsibility.

“Most importantly, the lack of coordination between policies leaves most victims unattended and vulnerable,” Ms. Deschamps told a news conference at UN Headquarters, joined by fellow panellists Yasmin Sooka, the Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa, and Hassan Jallow, the Prosecutor of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

Ms. Deschamps said the shortcomings in the policies materialized in the response of the UN to the allegations in CAR. “Instead of reporting the allegations in an urgent manner, as the egregiousness of the alleged conduct dictated, they were kept quiet. As those who followed the matter know, it took months before France was given details on the allegations.”

In addition, she noted that while a human rights officer and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) staff initially investigated the allegations, there was no follow-up to the interviews.

“Those UN staff who came across the information did not feel concerned or took the position that someone else should address or was addressing the problem. In our view, this was a serious failure. Not only did this show abuse of authority by senior officials on an individual basis, but it also highlights deficiencies at an institutional level.”

Mr. Ban said he intended to urgently review the panel’s recommendations and act without delay to ensure that systemic issues, fragmentation and other problems are fully addressed. He stressed, however, that some of these recommendations will require the involvement and approval of Member States.

He recalled that over the years, the UN has put in place a host of measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse by its peacekeeping personnel, and to react robustly when violations occur.

“Still, it is clear that we must do much more, especially to better align our peacekeeping and human rights systems,” he stated. “As the report indicates, the handling of sexual exploitation and abuse is particularly complicated when, as in this case, troops are not under United Nations command.

“The United Nations does not have authority over contingents of troops that operate outside United Nations peacekeeping. This in no way diminishes the responsibility of the United Nations to speak out when other troops commit violations. Yet too often, national responses to allegations of abuse are slow, muted or non-existent. We must address this major weakness,” he continued.
“Victims do not care what colour helmet or uniform is worn by those who come to protect them. Our duty is to uphold the trust that must underpin all international engagements.”

The panel highlighted the need for conflict-related sexual violence by peacekeepers to be addressed under a harmonized human rights policy. Among its recommendations is the creation of one single coordination unit, placed under the direct oversight of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, tasked with receiving the reports, following up on the allegations and coordinating the process.

In a statement issued today, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein voiced his support for the Secretary-General in his determination to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse by all international peacekeeping forces, both UN and non-UN, and to resolve any systemic weaknesses that have been identified by the review panel.

“Investigations into sexual abuse must be made more systematic and effective, and those responsible for these most toxic of crimes must be punished, not least as a deterrence to others,” he said.

UNICEF said it is reviewing the panel’s report, especially references to those instances where the agency failed to implement its policy on responding to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, in order to draw practical lessons for the future.

“We, of course, deeply regret those failures, including in not adequately following up on the children’s wellbeing,” the agency said in a statement, adding that it has already instituted a new system of reporting to improve internal oversight of its response to reports of abuse, and is also instituting a new process to require more formal and systematic reporting by implementing partners on the support they are providing to child sexual abuse victims.

In special meeting, UN weighs measures to prevent terrorists from exploiting the Internet, social media

17 December - Stressing the need for States to work with the private sector to devise ways to prevent terrorists from exploiting the Internet while respecting human rights, the top United Nations political official today said curtailing the influence of terrorists and violent extremist groups must not come at the expense of curbing legitimate political discourse on the Internet or social media.

“Today’s topic…brings us to the fine line between benevolent and malevolent: freedoms and human rights apply to anyone anywhere, but only as long as they do not call into question the enjoyment of these freedoms and human rights by others,” Jeffrey Feltman, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told a special meeting of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee.

“It is precisely [the] exploitation by terrorists and violent extremists that can easily result in us restricting human rights and fundamental freedoms,” he continued, acknowledging that while it is now “a given that ICT is part of the equation in our effort to achieve a more sustainable, equitable and connected world,” it is this free flow of information that has led the Islamic Stat of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other extremist groups to successfully use the Internet to broadcast their ideology and to recruit foreign terrorist fighters.

Indeed, ISIL, Mr. Feltman continued, has raised the exploitation of the Internet and social media to a new level, luring over 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters from over 100 countries to join the conflicts in Syria and Iraq or inciting individuals to commit terrorist acts in their home countries. Thus, local and regional conflicts have unprecedented global repercussions.

“We cannot allow the internet to be abused to undermine the foundations of our societies,” he told the day-long event, which also featured opening remarks from Raimonda Murmokaité Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and Jean-Paul Laborde, Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED).

“How do we make our preventive and counter-measures more effective without calling into question the respect for human
rights and fundamental freedoms?” Mr. Feltman asked, and noted that the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is central to the answer: where rights and freedoms are jeopardized or granted selectively, the potential for grievances grows and can in turn provide fertile ground for recruitment by terrorist and violent extremist groups, ever more cost-effectively and far-reaching thanks to ICT.

The UN and Member States – working closely with the private sector and civil society – must act together to prevent and counter the exploitation of ICT resources and also develop their own effective strategic communications tools to expose the hypocrisy of terrorist and violent extremist groups as well as inspire and instil in potential recruits tangible alternatives, he underscored.

“The United Nations sees its role in support of Member States both as convener and provider of capacity-building,” stated Mr. Feltman, going to spotlight three core areas of activities: UN coherence; innovative dialogue with new partners; and a global framework.

Specifically on that issue, he announced that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will release, in the coming days, a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which will make strategic recommendations to address the drivers of violent extremism and to broaden our approach beyond ongoing, essential security-based counter-terrorism measures.

“It will call for greater attention to strategic communications at all levels. It will put an emphasis on youth, focusing on the interface between youth and social media, putting young people at the centre of our efforts to address the misuse of the internet,” added Mr. Feltman.

To complement Member States' efforts, he said that the UN Centre for Counter-Terrorism is exploring opportunities for capacity-building programmes to assist them in designing strategic communications that respond to the specific challenges posed by violent extremist communications.

As for what he called the even broader UN-provided framework, Mr. Feltman stressed that the UN Charter and international human rights law form the basis for effective preventive and counter-terrorism measures. “We have to end impunity and make sure that terrorists and their supporters are held accountable for incitement by having in place the appropriate legislative provisions to bring perpetrators to justice,” he said.

Today’s meeting coincides with the closing of the General Assembly’s High-Level meeting of the General Assembly on the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, and as the Security Council has convened a meeting of finance ministers from among its member States on ways to disrupt terrorist financing.

Yemen: parties at UN-facilitated talks agree on delivery of humanitarian aid in Taiz

17 December - On the third day of the United Nations-sponsored negotiations on ending the crisis in Yemen, the participants, meeting in Switzerland, have reached an agreement which allows for a full and immediate resumption of humanitarian assistance to the central city of Taiz.

The UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, welcomed this agreement as “a major step forward that will ensure immediate action to alleviate the human suffering of the Yemeni people and to ensure the neutral and impartial character of humanitarian action.”

A large UN convoy, carrying essential humanitarian supplies, reached the most affected districts of the city of Taiz and will start distributing assistance to those in need in the coming days. It is also expected that humanitarian assistance will reach Hajja, Sa’ada and other deprived Yemeni cities in the coming days.
The Special Envoy has congratulated the participants in the talks for this first important achievement and has encouraged them to work towards further agreements on measures that will allow for rapid, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian actors to reach people in need across all Yemeni governorates.

The consultations will continue in the next few days and seek to define a clear way forward with a special focus on specific areas: the development of a sustainable national ceasefire and the release of prisoners and detainees, the withdrawal of forces and creation of interim security measures, the organised return of heavy weapons to the state, the restoration of State control over public institutions in order to fight terrorism, in addition to the resumption of an inclusive political dialogue.

**UN's rapid response humanitarian fund marks 10th anniversary with plans to upgrade**

17 December - The United Nations rapid response funding mechanism for saving tens of thousands of lives in both sudden disasters and long-festering crises marked its 10th anniversary today with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon laying out plans to strengthen it in the face of mounting challenges.

“Despite the generosity of donors, the gap between humanitarian needs and the resources available to meet them is growing every year,” he told a ceremony at UN Headquarters in New York, citing Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) achievements over the past decade from rapid responses to earthquake quakes in Haiti and Nepal to humanitarian aid in the Syrian crisis.

“My High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing will soon recommend ways to transform funding so we can provide secure, adequate and predictable resources for people in crisis,” he said, adding that such financing will also be a priority at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May next year.

As we wait for the outcomes of these processes, the CERF remains well-placed to help address some of the key challenges that have already been identified, including the call for greater collaboration between aid agencies,” he added, stressing that financial needs are now five times greater than a decade ago.

He noted that every year, CERF has enabled humanitarian partners to provide critical health services to more than 20 million people, helped feed 10 million, provide water and sanitation to eight million, and bring emergency shelter to more than one million people.

“And it has helped make us faster. Within 11 hours of the earthquake in Haiti (in 2010), trucks were unloading life-saving aid. Within 48 hours of Nepal's recent earthquake, people were receiving timely life-saving assistance,” Mr. Ban said.

“Since 2011, the CERF has allocated more than $200 million to humanitarian efforts in Syria and neighbouring countries.”

The General Assembly set up CERF on 15 December 2005, to bring immediate relief in natural and man-made disasters and save thousands of lives that would otherwise be lost to delay.

At the time officials noted that it took four months between the time when access restrictions were lifted in Sudan's strife-torn Darfur region and funds were committed to the relief appeal. In that time, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) steadily climbed to 1.6 million and mortality rates rose above emergency levels.

When locust swarms infested Africa's Sahel region in 2004, early funding would have mitigated the effects at far less cost. In February that year, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) appealed for $9 million to spray locust larvae to prevent their spread, but it was under-funded. That summer, the locusts multiplied and FAO had to raise the appeal to $100 million.

“This (CERF) was a breakthrough in providing fast and predictable funding for early action at times of global crisis,” Mr. Ban said today. “Over the past decade, the Fund has been an essential component of our humanitarian response – and it has...
enhanced the credibility of the United Nations. Among the CERF’s key strengths is its flexibility and speed.”

‘Robust, decisive’ action needed now to avert civil war in Burundi, UN rights chief warns

17 December - The top United Nations human rights official today urged the international community to take “robust, decisive” action instead of “fiddling around the edges” to avert a civil war in Burundi that could have serious ethnic overtones and alarming regional consequences.

“Burundi is at bursting point, on the very cusp of a civil war,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein told the Human Rights Council in Geneva in a special Session in his latest warning on the Central African country where the UN played a key role in restoring stability after decades of war between Hutus and Tutsis that killed tens of thousands.

“The carnage of last week confirmed the extent to which violence and intimidation are catapulting the country back to the past – to Burundi’s deeply troubled, dark and horrendously violent past...and has only served to move the much-needed political solution further from reach,” he said, calling for involvement of the International Criminal Court to combat impunity.

Burundi has been in the midst of a political crisis since President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to run for a controversial third term earlier this year, since when at least 400 people have been killed, with the toll possibly considerably higher, and 220,000 have fled to neighbouring States with many others internally displaced. Just last month, Mr. Zeid warned of a relapse into full-fledged civil war.

“The time for piecemeal responses and fiddling around the edges is over,” he said today. “The situation in Burundi demands a robust, decisive response from the international community. I called last month on the Security Council to consider all possible steps to stop the ongoing violence and prevent a regional conflict, including travel bans and asset freezes.

“Today, those calls are more relevant than ever. Diplomatic and political calculations must not eclipse the need for action,” he added, warning of the “growing, alarming risk of regionalization of the crisis” and calling on Burundi’s neighbours to play a constructive role in defusing the crisis, including by monitoring borders, possibly with “drones,” to halt the reported flow of weapons.

He again highlighted the untenable situation for human rights defenders and independent journalists, most of whom have fled the country, and noted that many of the “220,000 terrified people” seeking refuge in neighbouring countries are the same families that had to flee their homes during the civil war and had returned over the past decade, full of hope for peace.

“Imagine the despair of having to relive such desperation and abandon one’s home yet again,” Mr. Zeid said, stressing that fear is also palpable among those who remain. “A frightened, uninformed population, fed a diet of hate speech and paranoia, is one that may be recruited to the path of violence by either side of the current political impasse,” he emphasized.

“The consequences of the mobilization of more such individuals would be catastrophic – especially given that ethnic elements are already being stoked – given the country’s terrible history in this regard,” he said.

He called on the Government to take all necessary steps to disarm pro-government militias and bring operations of the police, intelligence services and other security forces under the mantle of the law.

“While the future of the county is in the hands of Burundian leaders, this Council has a clear responsibility to do all in its power to prevent the worst from materializing in Burundi in the coming days,” he concluded. “We owe no less to the people of Burundi, who have endured enough.”
Every two seconds, a baby is born in a conflict zone – UNICEF

17 December - More than 16 million babies in 2015 were born in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen or on perilous journeys to escape fighting, which translates to 1 in 8 of all births worldwide, or one newborn every two seconds, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said today.

“Can there be a worse start in life?” asked UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake in a news release, appealing to the world to translate promises made in historic agreements over the past year into action to benefit the most vulnerable children in 2016.

“The final months of 2015 have seen the world come together around tackling climate change and a new global development agenda. These ambitious agreements present a huge opportunity if we can translate our promises into action for the most vulnerable children,” he said.

“If we address the reasons so many families feel the need to uproot themselves and their children from their homes – by resolving conflict, by addressing climate change, by expanding opportunity, we can make 2016 a year of hope for millions – not a year of despair,” emphasized the UNICEF chief.

UNICEF said that in conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen, or on perilous journeys to escape fighting, newborn children and their mothers face enormous risks.

Pregnant mothers are in danger of giving birth without medical help and in unsanitary conditions, and their children are more likely to die before they reach their fifth birthdays and to experience extreme – or ‘toxic; – stress, which can inhibit their long-term emotional and cognitive development, it said.

“Every two seconds, a newborn takes its first breath in the midst of conflict, often in terrifying circumstances and without access to medical care,” Mr. Lake said. “Too many children are now starting their lives in extreme circumstances – from conflict to natural disasters, poverty, disease or malnutrition.”

And in addition to conflict and poverty, UNICEF noted the effects of climate change and lack of opportunity are making children increasingly vulnerable and have pushed millions on dangerous journeys away from their homes.

UNICEF also noted:

- More than 200,000 children applied for asylum in European Union countries in the first nine months of 2015, adding to the 30 million children across the globe forced from their homes by 2014 due to war, violence and persecution. More people are displaced now than at any moment since World War;  
- More than a quarter of a billion children – or 1 in 9 – live in countries and areas in conflict and face enormous obstacles to their health, education and well-being;  
- More than half a billion children live in areas where floods are extremely common and nearly 160 million live in high or extremely high drought severity zones; and  
- Children represent almost half of all people living in extreme poverty although they make up roughly a third of the world’s population.
UN Member States outline information technology and Internet roadmap to achieve sustainable development

17 December - With the curtain closed on the two-day review by the United Nations General Assembly of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Member States have adopted an outcome document which aims at bridging the digital divide, ensure freedom of speech, and address Internet governance to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

"ICT[Information and Communications Technologies] has played an increasingly important role in promoting economic and social development, such as enhancing productivity, facilitating trade, creating quality jobs, providing ICT-based services such as e-health and e-learning, and improving governance,” said Mogens Lykketoft, UN General Assembly President, who convened the conference, known as the WSIS+10 High-Level Meeting, which began Tuesday and wrapped up last evening.

Sounding a similar note, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said ICTs could be an engine for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly as this High-Level review came just three months after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. “They can power this global undertaking,” he said.

While over 4/5 households in developed world have Internet access, a critical digital divide remains, noted the outcome, as the majority of households in developing countries are without this access, according to the Outcome Document.

“Women are half the global population – yet 200 million fewer women than men have access to the Internet,” stressed Mr. Ban, adding that “we must bridge these divides.”

The outcome therefore urged strengthening policy and international partnership to improve infrastructure capacities and increase financing in this regard.

Through the review’s Outcome, UN Member States also reaffirmed their “common desire and commitment to the WSIS vision to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society,” and pledged to pursue ICT for sustainable development, bridge the digital and knowledge divides, and reaffirmed that “as an essential foundation of the Information Society… that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online.”

Meanwhile, new challenges such as cybercrimes, cyberattacks, and the use of ICTs for terrorist purposes have emerged. These threats have alerted governments of the need to step up efforts in tackling national security, together with the important role of international law in building confidence in ICT.

Further underscoring the need of active engagement by governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations and other stakeholders, the outcome also decided to extend the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) for another decade, which has been an effective platform for discussions.

The General Assembly also agreed that it will hold a High Level Meeting on the overall review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes in 2025.
New bill in Finland threatens Sami peoples’ right to traditional lands, livelihoods, UN expert warns

17 December - A United Nations human rights expert expressed deep concern today at the lack of consultation and the reduced protections to the Sami indigenous people in the current draft law on the Finnish Forest and Parks Service (Metsähallitus) to regulate the management of State-owned lands.

“The new draft bill presented to the Finnish Parliament earlier this month no longer contains valuable safeguards for the Sami people's rights to traditional livelihoods, lands, territories and resources, which had been included in the previous draft approved in 2014,” warned the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz.

“I hope that the draft law will consider that the Sami Parliament and the Skolt Sami Village Council have had limited opportunities to take part in this process which is contrary to article 19 of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Finland has endorsed,” she said.

According to the new bill, most of the Sami Homeland will be transferred to a new State-owned company that has yet to be established, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). This new company will have the responsibility for all logging carried out on State-owned lands in Finland, including in the Sami Homeland region.

“States should consult with indigenous peoples concerned through their representative institutions to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them,” the expert said quoting the Declaration.

Ms. Tauli-Corpuz warned that without specific provisions safeguarding the Sami people, the revised Act will significantly weaken their rights, particularly the right to enjoy their own culture and to pursue their traditional livelihoods, and will further limit any recognition of their right to lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.

The UN Special Rapporteur also stressed that “it is crucial that with the transfer of liabilities to a new company, successfully negotiated agreements with the Metsähallitus and Sami reindeer herding cooperatives, such as land which has been designated as off-limits from forestry activities including logging, be transferred.”
UN and Middle East partners condemn ‘all acts of terror,’ reiterate need to de-escalate current tensions

17 December - After two days of meetings in Jerusalem and Ramallah with Israeli and Palestinian officials, the United Nations and its partners in the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East peace process strongly condemned today all acts of terror and stressed the importance of opposing unequivocally incitement and violence and de-escalate the situation.

According to a statement issued from Jerusalem, the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet – from the European Union, the United States and the United Nations – met with their Israeli counterparts on 16 and 17 December.

Over the two days, the statement explains, the Quartet Envoys met with officials from the Israeli Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and officials from the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian Authority to discuss current conditions on the ground and concrete actions to demonstrate their commitment to the two-state solution.

“The Quartet Envoys reiterated the need for significant steps on the ground, in line with previous agreements, which will strengthen Palestinian institutions, security and economic prospects, while respecting Israel's legitimate security concerns,” said the statement, adding that the Envoys will review the results of their recent engagement with the parties and with regional States, and report to their Principals with recommendations on next steps.

Ban hails commitment by Costa Rica, Nicaragua to abide by UN court’s ruling on border dispute

17 December - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the commitment by Costa Rica and Nicaragua to abide by the United Nations International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on their border dispute.

In decision on the joined cases concerning territorial and related differences between the two sides, the Hague-based ICJ ruled yesterday that Nicaragua violated Costa Rica’s territorial sovereignty and navigational rights but did not breach procedural or substantive environmental obligations through its dredging of the San Juan River.

It also ruled that Costa Rica violated its obligation to carry out an environmental impact assessment concerning the construction of Route 1856, but did not breach substantive environmental obligations.

“The Secretary-General expresses the hope that Nicaragua and Costa Rica will continue working to improve their relations as neighbouring countries with strong linkages among their citizens,” a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson said.

“He encourages the two Governments to abide by the ICJ’s decision, as they have both publicly committed to do,” it added.
UN officials hail Colombian accord on conflict victims for acknowledging violence suffered by women

17 December - The “breakthrough” agreement signed this week by the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP) on victims of the decades-long conflict also acknowledges the various forms of violence that women have suffered and removes amnesties for the most serious crimes such as sexual violence, two senior United Nations officials said today.

“We congratulate the many actors, that have made this breakthrough possible,” said Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of UN Women, and Zainab Hawa Bangura, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, in a joint statement.

The agreement on 15 December 2015 between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) on truth, justice, reparations and non-repetition for the victims “marks a milestone on the path to ending five decades of conflict, and puts the rights of the victims at the heart of the peace and transitional justice process,” the statement said.

“The agreement acknowledges the different forms of violence that women have suffered, including conflict-related sexual violence, and integrates gender equality comprehensively,” it said. “It emphasizes the specific impact that the conflict has had on women and girls, and acknowledges the transformative potential of gender equality and the protection of women’s rights,” it said.

The statement also described as “a crucial step forward in the fight against impunity” the decision to remove amnesties for the most serious crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence.

Saying Colombian women have worked tirelessly to play a significant role in this process, the two officials urged that women continue to have a key role in the implementation of this agreement, including with regard to the design of reparation programmes.

“One of the key goals of this agreement relates to guarantees of non-repetition so that the crimes of the conflict never occur again,” the statement said. “It is therefore crucial that in every aspect of the implementation of this and previous agreements, Colombia also addresses the structural inequalities and discrimination that lie at the root of conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence more generally.”

The statement also called on the international community to continue to support Colombia, as it seizes this historic opportunity to bring peace and justice to its people in a process that will serve as a source of inspiration for the region and for the world.

The FARC have been in talks with the Government for the past two years, seeking to end a 51-year conflict that has left almost a quarter of a million victims.