Nearly 25,000 flee Ramadi amid ISIL attacks and heavy fighting, says UN relief wing

18 May - With stocks running low and funds running out, United Nations aid agencies are rushing humanitarian assistance to people fleeing the city of Ramadi in central Iraq for the second time this month, according to the UN office tasked with coordinating relief operations.

“Nothing is more important right now than helping the people fleeing Ramadi. They are in trouble and we need to do everything possible to help them,” said Lise Grande, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the country. “Thousands of people had to sleep in the open because they didn't have places to stay. We would be able to do much more if we had the funding.”

Almost 25,000 people have fled Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province, following recent attacks by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and fierce fighting in the city. Most of the displaced are heading towards Baghdad, with several thousands of families fleeing for the second time in a month.

In response to urgent requests from Iraqi authorities, agencies including the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have responded with the WFP distributing food and thousands of immediate response rations in several cities where internally displaced persons are concentrating for safety.
Meanwhile, UNICEF is working with partners to distribute emergency kits, while the WHO has sent mobile health teams and ambulances to areas where the displaced are fleeing and the UNHCR is working to help assess and equip reception areas and temporary camps and UNICEF is providing mobile latrines, showers and hygiene items to internal displaced persons (IDPs) camps.

More than 2.5 million displaced persons and refugees are receiving assistance each month from UN agencies and front-line partners. But funding for these life-saving programmes is nearly exhausted. By June, 56 health programmes will be forced to close; the majority in camps and settlements where IDPs are concentrated. In July, the food pipeline will break.

“Abandoning the victims of violence is unthinkable; more has to be done,” Ms. Grande said.

The United Nations will launch a humanitarian appeal for Iraq on 4 June in Brussels. The appeal includes highly prioritised programmes to meet the most urgent needs of vulnerable people in Iraq, including people who have been displaced from Ramadi.

In the last month, UN agencies and non-governmental organisations have provided life-assistance to more than 130,000 people who fled Ramadi following ISIL attacks in April. Tens of thousands of kits and rations have been distributed to more than 35 locations across Anbar Governorate.

**Some 75 per cent of all workers employed now in part-time or temporary jobs – UN labour agency**

18 May - The International Labour Organization (ILO) today warned of widespread insecurity in the global employment market, saying that some 75 per cent of all workers are employed on temporary or short-term contracts in informal jobs often without any contract, under own-account arrangements or in unpaid family jobs.


“These new figures point to an increasingly diversified world of work. In some cases, non-standard forms of work can help people get a foothold into the job market. But these emerging trends are also a reflection of the widespread insecurity that’s affecting many workers worldwide today,” <A HREF="http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_368252/lang--en/index.htm">said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder</A>.

“The shift we’re seeing from the traditional employment relationship to more non-standard forms of employment is in many cases associated with the rise in inequality and poverty rates in many countries,” added Mr. Ryder.

This year’s report entitled <i>The Changing Nature of Jobs</i>, shows that only one quarter of workers worldwide is estimated to have a stable employment relationship.

The report also notes that while wage and salaried work is growing worldwide, it still accounts for only half of global employment, with wide variations across regions.

“For example, in the developed economies and Central and South-Eastern Europe, around eight in ten workers are employees, whereas in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa the figure is closer to two in ten,” it said.

“Another current trend is the rise in part-time employment, especially among women. In the majority of countries with available information, part-time jobs outpaced gains in full-time jobs between 2009 and 2013,” according to the report.

Only one quarter of workers worldwide is estimated to have a stable employment relationship, meaning that three quarters
of workers are employed on temporary or short-term contracts, in informal jobs often without any contract, under own-account arrangements or in unpaid family jobs, the report’s findings show.

At a time when the global economy is not creating a sufficient number of jobs, the study reports that more than 60 per cent of all workers lack any kind of employment contract, with most of them engaged in ‘own-account work’ or contributing family work in the developing world.

“Even among wage and salaried workers, less than half (42 percent) are working on a permanent contract,” it said.

The report also found that income inequality is increasing or remains high in the majority of countries – a trend that is aggravated by the rising incidence of non-permanent forms of employment, growing unemployment and inactivity.

And despite the positive steps made towards improving pension coverage, social protection, such as unemployment benefits, is still mainly available only for regular employees. For the self-employed, even pensions are scarce: in 2013, only 16 per cent of the self-employed contributed to a pension scheme.

“There is a growing recognition that labour regulation is necessary to protect workers – especially those in non-standard work – from arbitrary or unfair treatment and to enable effective contracts between employers and workers,” the report’s authors wrote.

“Employment protection laws have been very gradually strengthening over time, a trend that is common across most countries and regions. However, in Europe, labour protection has generally decreased since 2008 when the global financial crisis started.”

The report also looks at the increasing importance of global supply chains in shaping some of the employment and income patterns that are observed in labour markets today.

“An estimate based on some 40 countries with available data finds that more than one in five jobs worldwide is linked to global supply chains,” the report says. “That is, jobs that contribute to the production of goods and services that are either consumed or further processed in other countries.”

ILO estimates that global unemployment figures reached 201 million in 2014, over 30 million higher than before the start of the global crisis in 2008.

“Moreover, providing jobs to more than 40 million additional people who enter the global labour market every year is proving to be a daunting challenge,” the report’s authors conclude. “In addition to widespread joblessness, the employment relationship itself is facing a major transformation that is bringing further challenges.”

“The way forward is to ensure that policies take into consideration the evolution of how we work today,” said Mr. Ryder, explaining that this means stimulating investment opportunities to boost job creation and productivity, while ensuring adequate income security to all types of workers, not just those on stable contracts.
Citing ‘defining moment’ sparked by Ebola outbreak, UN health agency chief pledges key reforms

18 May - The head of the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) today promised a new $100 million emergency fund and a global health crisis workforce as part of a reform package prompted by the response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, saying: “I do not ever again want to see this organization faced with a situation it is not prepared, staffed, funded, or administratively set up to manage.”

“The world was ill-prepared to respond to an outbreak that was so widespread, so severe, so sustained, and so complex,” WHO Director-General Margaret Chan told the 68th session of the World Health Assembly, the top decision-making body of the UN agency that opened today in Geneva, Switzerland.

Noting that “WHO was overwhelmed, as were all other responders,” and the demands on WHO were more than 10 times greater than ever experienced in its almost 70-year history, Dr. Chan proposed making “fundamental changes” to enable her organization to deal with future health emergencies like Ebola, which has claimed more than 11,000 lives.

Dr. Chan said she is establishing a global health emergency workforce, strengthening WHO’s core and surge capacity of trained emergency response staff, developing new business processes to facilitate a rapid and effective response, proposed options for a new $100 million contingency fund and setting clear performance metrics for the programme, built on partnerships with other responders.

“The new programme is designed for speed, flexibility, and rapid impact,” she said. “It reports directly to me, and I am accountable to you. The programme will have performance benchmarks showing what must happen within 24, 48, and 72 hours, not months.”

An independent panel tasked to assess WHO’s response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa said last week in its first report that the agency “does not have the operational capacity or culture to deliver a full emergency public health response” and urged investments by its member States to make it fit for purpose.

In her opening address, Dr. Chan told the agency’s Member States that while WHO is responding to the devastating earthquakes in Nepal, where it is coordinating the work of more than 150 humanitarian organizations and 130 self-sufficient foreign medical teams, the biggest emergency response is concentrated in West Africa to deal with the Ebola virus.

On a positive note on the Ebola front, she noted that “many appreciated the way WHO moved to unite scientists, the R&D (research and development) community, and the pharmaceutical industry to develop vaccines, medicines, therapies, and rapid diagnostic tests with record-breaking speed.”

Looking ahead, Dr. Chan addressed ways global health has been impacted by a world that has changed dramatically since the start of this century, saying “this is a unique time in history where economic progress is actually increasing threats to health instead of reducing them.”

The WHO chief noted how the “the world population got bigger, more urban, and a lot older, adding dementia to the list of top priorities” and how “unfairness and social injustice were documented in statistics showing the number of forced teenage marriages, the births that never got registered, the estimated 212 million children who are stunted or wasted, and the millions of people driven below the poverty line by the costs of health care they could not live without.”

“Hunger persisted, but the world as a whole got fat,” she said, and “non-communicable diseases overtook infectious diseases as the principal driver of global mortality.”
She also reminded the audience how “more and more first- and second-line antimicrobials failed, raising the spectre of a post-antibiotic era in which common infections will once again kill.”

Dr. Chan also listed a number of areas where global health gains have been made.

Those ranged from that fact that maternal and childhood deaths are falling faster than ever before, with some of the fastest drops recorded in sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS reached a tipping point, when the number of people newly receiving antiretroviral therapy surpassed the number of new infections, to a 47 per cent reduction in mortality in malaria, 37 million lives saved by effective treatment of tuberculosis and the closest ever to polio eradication, she said.

The World Health Assembly, which meets every May, is attended by all 194 WHO Member States, and determines the policies of the UN health agency, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.

**Ban urges all sides in Yemen to renew commitment for extension of humanitarian pause**

18 May - Stressing that Yemenis have faced “tragic levels of suffering and violence” in recent months, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on all sides in the conflict to refrain from any actions that undermine the safety and security of the country’s airports, seaports and transportation infrastructure, and to join consultations without preconditions.

Mr. Ban strongly encouraged ending immediately the interruptions in the import of fuel, food and medicines, in a statement delivered on his behalf by his Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, yesterday in Saudi Arabia at the Riyadh Conference on the situation in the country.

“Yemenis have faced tragic levels of suffering and violence in recent months. The humanitarian pause is important to give them time to seek medical assistance and for much-needed basic goods to flow into the country. This pause must now become a permanent ceasefire and mark an end to all hostilities,” he declared.

In order to allow the UN to provide much-needed humanitarian assistance, Mr. Ban reiterated his call on all parties to ensure that humanitarian agencies and their partners have safe and reliable access throughout the country.

“We have seen how the humanitarian pause has provided a ray of hope and badly needed aid to the people of Yemen. In this spirit, I call on all sides to renew their commitment to the humanitarian pause for another 5-day period,” he added.

The Secretary-General said that he is strongly determined to intensify his good offices and he intends to convene in the near future an inclusive and widely representative conference that will restart a Yemeni-Yemeni peace process in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

According to UN spokesperson Farhan Haq, while in Riyadh, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed met with Yemeni President Abd Rabuh Mansour Hadi, Vice-President and Prime Minister Khaled Bahah and many Yemeni political leaders, as well as the ambassadors of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. He also met with General Abdulrahman Al-Banyan, Chief of Staff of the Royal Saudi Armed Forces, as part of his advocacy to secure an extension of the humanitarian pause.

For its duration, the humanitarian pause greatly facilitated access to areas which had been extremely difficult to reach. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported that people affected by the conflict were able to move out of insecure areas, seek medical care and receive help, Mr. Haq told reporters at the daily noon briefing at UN Headquarters.

People previously trapped by fighting and airstrikes in Sa’ada, Aden, Lahj, Abyan and Al Dhale’e have reportedly moved from districts where access was previously blocked.
In the first four days of the pause, relief workers dispatched enough food aid to cover one month of food needs for more than 273,000 people, delivered fuel to ensure safe water access for 1.2 million people, and transported or distributed enough essential non-food items for nearly 32,000 people. Some 47 metric tonnes of medical supplies were given to hospitals and health facilities in five governorates.

However, insecurity, fuel shortages and other logistical challenges hindered full implementation of the humanitarian plan during the pause, Mr. Haq said.

Health facilities report that since 19 March, some 1,820 people have been killed and 7,330 injured due to the conflict. Casualty figures are likely to be underestimates. Humanitarian partners estimate that more than 545,000 people have been displaced in Yemen since 26 March.

**South Sudan: UN says 650,000 at risk due to renewed violence, as Security Council threatens sanctions**

18 May - Gravely concerned at the ongoing violence in South Sudan, the Security Council has condemned both the renewed Government-led offensive in Unity state, as well as a recent large-scale attack by opposition forces on the war-torn town of Malakal, threatening to impose sanctions on all those threatening the country’s peace, security and stability.

In a press statement issued over the weekend, the Council condemned renewed and ongoing large-scale violence in Unity state caused by a South Sudanese Government offensive that has displaced more than 100,000 civilians and resulted in the suspension of nearly all aid activity to affected areas – impacting more than 300,000 civilians.

The members of the Council further expressed their condemnation of the large-scale attack initiated on 15 May by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLM/A) in Opposition on the town of Malakal, in Upper Nile state.

More than 50,000 internally displaced persons have sought shelter and assistance at the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) camp in Bentiu, and an additional nearly 25,000 at the UNMISS camp in Malakal, only further magnifying a dire humanitarian crisis,” the statement read, calling on all parties to engage meaningfully in the peace process so as to bring about a political solution to the crisis and an end to the conflict.

Against this backdrop, the Council “reiterated its willingness to impose sanctions against those who threaten the peace, security, or stability” of South Sudan as established in resolution 2206 (2015), and noted the 24 March 2015 African Union Peace and Security Council Communiqué, and the 12 May 2015 African Union Commission Chairperson’s Statement on South Sudan.

The Council’s broader concerns were echoed by UNMISS itself, which today said that it is deeply concerned by the fighting that took place in Malakal this weekend following the attack launched by opposition forces on Friday afternoon.

According to a UN spokesperson in New York, UNMISS strongly condemned this new cycle of violence and yet another violation of the cessation of hostility agreement. The Mission is calling on all parties to conclude a comprehensive peace agreement at the earliest, and reiterates that there cannot be a military solution to the conflict.

Relief workers report that in Malakal, armed groups have engaged in combat next to the UN civilian protection site and, as a consequence, civilians trying to stay out of harm’s way have been injured.

The Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan, Toby Lanzer, warned that military operations in Unity and Upper Nile states over the past three days have again devastated countless lives. Eyewitness accounts report targeted rape and killing of civilians, including children.

The offensive in Unity state has left thousands of homes burnt and Leer hospital is again under threat of destruction.
UN agencies and their partners are working to address the immense humanitarian consequences of the violence, which has resulted in more than 650,000 civilians being left without life-saving aid.

In the coming days, humanitarian staff plan to travel to Leer and Malakal to assess the humanitarian situation, the spokesperson added.

**Progress on sustainable energy improving, but more needed to meet agreed targets – UN backed-report**

*18 May* - Renewable energy generation and energy efficiency improvements will need to accelerate dramatically if the world is to achieve universal access to sustainable energy by 2030, according to a United Nations-backed report released today as senior leaders from government, business, finance, civil society and global institutions are gathering in New York for the second annual Sustainable Energy for All Forum.

The world is heading in the right direction under the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) initiative, the Progress Toward Sustainable Energy: Global Tracking Framework 2015 report says, but it must move faster.

According to the report, some 1.1 billion people in the world still live without electricity and almost 3 billion still cook using polluting fuels like kerosene, wood, charcoal and dung. And, while picking up steam, renewable energy generation and energy efficiency improvements will need to accelerate dramatically, it says.

“We are heading in the right direction to end energy poverty,” said Anita Marangoly George, Senior Director of the World Bank’s Energy and Extractives Global Practice. “But we are still far from the finish line.”

The Forum, which opened today and runs through 21 May, comes at a significant time, building momentum on energy issues ahead of both the September UN summit to adopt the post-2015 development agenda, and the December climate conference in Paris. It will contribute to shaping the direction of energy policy for the crucial decades to come, and catalyse vital investment to help make sustainable energy for all a reality by 2030.

“Energy touches everything. That’s why you’re here,” Kandeh Yumkella, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Sustainable Energy for All and CEO of the SE4All initiative, told delegates at the opening plenary today. “Our mantra going forward is very simple: converting commitments to kilowatt hours for real people.”

Mr. Yumkella was joined at the opening by Ms. George, as well as Nilda Mesa, Director of the New York City Mayor’s Office of Sustainability; NASDAQ Vice Chairman Sandy Frucher; and Thione Niang, co-founder with R&B artist Akon of Akon Lighting Africa, which is working to provide solar power in more than 10 African countries.

“I grew up trying to beat the sun so I could do my homework before the sun went down,” Mr. Niang said. “We take this fight very personally because we grew up knowing the disadvantages of not having electricity.”

In the report’s tracking period – from 2010 to 2012 – the share of modern renewable energy in the global energy mix grew rapidly at 4 per cent a year, making up 8.8 per cent of total, but to meet the 2030 SE4All objective, the annual growth rate for renewables needs to be closer to 7.5 per cent.

Other areas also saw a pick-up in pace, though not enough to meet the three goals of SE4All, which are universal energy access, a doubling in the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency, and a doubling in the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix – all by 2030.

The number of people without access to electricity and the number of people still cooking using polluting fuels like kerosene, wood, charcoal and dung reduced at a faster rate over the two years tracked compared to the previous 20 years, though progress on the latter was slower.
Renewable energy generation and energy efficiency improvements also picked up steam but will need even more dramatic accelerations, the report says.

“We will need to work a lot harder especially to mobilize much larger investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency,” said Ms. George. “Leveraging public finance to mobilize private capital is imperative in achieving these goals.”

To help close the gap the report recommends global policy makers work to triple energy investments from the current level of roughly $400 billion to $1.25 trillion and to adopt modern methods of measuring energy access to replace more traditional measures, such as presence of a household electricity connection, which mask vast differences in the quality of energy services.

The report, compiled by the World Bank, also calls for transfer of knowledge and technology for sustainable energy and for increased effort to address the linkages between energy and other development sectors, including water, agriculture, gender and health. Better understanding those linkages will be critical to achieving SE4All and other development goals.

In Geneva, UN envoy on Syria meets with international stakeholders amid ongoing consultations

18 May - The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria has continued to meet with Syrian, regional and international interlocutors today in the framework of the Geneva Consultations, according to a spokesperson for the Organization.

Addressing reporters in New York earlier this afternoon, UN spokesperson Farhan Haq said Staffan de Mistura met this morning with a delegation of the Syrian Popular Front for Change and Liberation, led by Qadri Jameel, who briefed on various perspectives on resolving the Syrian conflict while also addressing the deteriorating situation in Syria and in the region.

According to the UN, during Syria’s tragic five-year arc of conflict, 220,000 people have been killed, more than one million have been injured, 7.6 million have been displaced and four million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. And the suffering continues to this day. In the past weeks alone, well over 100,000 people were displaced in a new wave of fighting in Idlib while some 14 million people are now displaced due to the interlinked crises in Syria and Iraq.

The UN envoy also reportedly received a delegation from the People’s Republic of China, with whom he discussed the ongoing efforts of the international community to help Syrians end their conflict through political means, as well as the role of the UN and the Security Council.

Meanwhile, this afternoon, a delegation of the State of Qatar briefed the Special Envoy on regional efforts in support of a political solution to the Syrian conflict, Mr. Haq noted.

Against that backdrop, Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, joined today's Geneva Consultations, impressing upon Mr. de Mistura the significance of engaging regional countries and organizations in constructive efforts to end the conflict in Syria.

The ongoing consultations – facilitated by the UN and Mr. de Mistura – are aimed at bolstering implementation of the Geneva Communiqué, which was adopted after the first international meeting on the issue on 30 June 2012, and since endorsed by the UN Security Council.

The document lays out key steps in a process to end the violence. Among others, it calls 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.
UN provides assistance as diarrhoea outbreak leaves seven Burundi refugees dead at Tanzania camp

18 May - The United Nations refugee agency has announced today that it is taking urgent measures to contain the spread of a severe watery diarrhoea outbreak among newly arrived Burundian refugees in Tanzania, as seven people have been reported dead since Wednesday.

“UNHCR’s priority is to work with the Ministry of Health and international partners to prepare for the worst and quickly establish a cholera treatment centre in Kagunga,” Joyce Mends-Cole from the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Tanzania said in a press release.

“There is only a small dispensary in that village, lacking required diagnostics and treatment modalities - including medication,” she added.

The UN refugee agency is also flying in urgently needed medication, to supplement what can be found locally.

Two specimens have preliminary been diagnosed as cholera, but we are awaiting official confirmation from a reference laboratory.

Another 77 Burundians in Nyarugusu – in the western province of Kigoma – are being treated for severe watery diarrhoea. Some 300 people are being treated for watery diarrhoea at Kagunga – near the Tanzanian border - and at the Stadium in Kigoma.

Kagunga is a small village surrounded by a steep mountain range on the Tanzanian side and is best accessible by boat. Since Burundian refugees started to arrive in Kagunga early May, UNHCR has moved them by boat to Kigoma and from there to the refugee camp in Nyarugusu.

More than 20,000 refugees have either been moved to, or arrived at the refugee camp. Meanwhile, UNHCR is taking urgent preventative measures to improve sanitation, hygiene and early detection, as well as a hygiene promotion information campaign.

In Tanzania, the number of refugees arriving in Kagunga has risen sharply over the last few days and the living conditions have become extremely dire. Local immigration authorities reported that over 50,000 Burundians were living rough in Kagunga on the shore of Lake Tanganyika.

Civilians in Yarmouk facing vulnerability of ‘highest severity,’ says UN agency

18 May - As the United Nations agency assisting Palestinian refugees in the Middle East continued humanitarian operations in around the Yarmouk Camp, deep concerns remained about violence that continues to profoundly threaten the lives and safety of Palestine refugees.

“The vulnerability of civilians in Yarmouk remains of the highest severity,” said UNRWA spokesperson, Christopher Gunness. “Without access, the most basic humanitarian needs of up to 18,000 Palestinian and Syrian civilians, including 3,500 children, continue to be left unmet.”

Illustrating the importance of such assistance, UNRWA used their latest day-long trip to Yalda, Babila and Beit Saham to
provide essential health services, vaccinations, dental services, fresh water and child nutritional supplements contributed by WFP and UNICEF. At a mobile health point, medical personnel treated 315 patients and found one child under five years old who was moderately malnourished. They also distributed child nutritional supplements, food and medicines.

“UNRWA’s priority remains the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians within Yarmouk itself,” said Mr. Gunness, who reiterated the agency’s strong demand for respect and compliance with obligations to protect civilians and the establishment of secure conditions under which life-saving humanitarian assistance can be delivered.

Those receiving assistance were Palestinian and Syrian families displaced or affected by conflict, plus host communities, and UNRWA continues providing assistance to civilians from Yarmouk who remain displaced in Tadamoun, an area on the north-eastern periphery.

“We cannot continue to leave this besieged community without life-saving support,” Mr. Gunness said. “UNRWA’s ongoing operations to the areas around Yarmouk represent a sustained demonstration of the commitment of the UN, both UNRWA and partners, to providing essential assistance to all civilians affected by the crisis in Yarmouk.”

UNRWA continues to work closely with partners and UN Agencies to mobilize resources for a large-scale humanitarian response to support the civilians of Yarmouk. Stocks of food, mattresses, blankets, and hygiene kits have been prepositioned to respond in case of further displacements from Yarmouk.

The agency has appealed to donors to increase support through its Call for Funds, seeking an immediate injection of $30 million. The UNRWA Syria Crisis Appeal has received only 21 per cent of the funds needed for 2015 and chronic underfunding for humanitarian interventions in Syria continues to undermine the agency's capacity to sustain life-saving emergency interventions.

**In talks with Southeast Asian leaders, top UN officials stress need to protect migrants stranded at sea**

17 May - Increasingly concerned about the plight of migrants and refugees stranded in the Andaman Sea and Straits of Malacca, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson have spoken separately to leaders in Southeast Asia reiterating the need to protect lives and uphold the obligation of rescue at sea.

A statement issued today in New York by a UN spokesperson said that in recent days, the Secretary-General has spoken to the Prime Ministers of Malaysia, Dato' Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, and Thailand, Prayuth Chan-ocha. The Deputy Secretary-General has also spoken to the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, Abul Hasan Mahmood Ali, and the Deputy-Minister for Multilateral Affairs of Indonesia, Hasan Kleib.

“In their discussions with leaders in the region, they reiterated the need to protect lives and uphold international law. Furthermore, they stressed the need for the timely disembarkation of migrants. They also urged leaders to uphold the obligation of rescue at sea and maintain the prohibition on refoulement,” the statement said. Refoulement is the forcible return of individuals to their country of origin where they could face persecution.

It went on to say the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General also encouraged leaders to participate in the upcoming regional meeting in Bangkok on the migrant situation.

“They hope that the meeting will lead to comprehensive outcomes at the regional and international levels,” said the statement, underscoring that the United Nations stands ready to assist all efforts to address the situation, including at the proposed meeting.

The statement by the top two UN officials comes in the wake of a strong call issued this past Friday by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, who urged governments in Southeast Asia to take swift action to protect the lives of migrants stranded in precarious maritime conditions and warned against the policy of pushing boats back.
out to sea.

“...I am appalled at reports that Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia have been pushing boats full of vulnerable migrants back out to sea, which will inevitably lead to many avoidable deaths,” the UN rights chief said. “The focus should be on saving lives, not further endangering them.”

While Mr. Zeid praised Indonesia for disembarking 582 migrants on 10 May, and Malaysia for disembarking 1,018 the following day, he said the “incomprehensible and inhumane” policy of “pushbacks” was endangering lives. He also spoke against countries’ plans to criminalize vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers who have crossed borders irregularly.

“Governments in South-East Asia need to respond to this crisis from the premise that migrants, regardless of their legal status, how they arrive at borders, or where they come from, are people with rights that must be upheld,” he said. “Criminalizing such vulnerable people, including children, and placing them in detention is not the solution.”

Around 6,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants are believed to remain stranded at sea in precarious conditions in the region and the High Commissioner said the individual circumstances of all migrants and asylum seekers at international borders should be assessed, and appropriate protection provided according to international human rights and refugee law, including ensuring that the principle of non-refoulement is upheld.

He called for further action against traffickers and abusive smugglers and welcomed the announcement that Thailand would host a regional meeting on irregular migration in the Indian Ocean on 29 May. In discussions on comprehensive responses, the regional meeting would seek to address root causes, one of which, he said, was the importance of addressing the serious human rights situation in Rakhine state, in Myanmar.

As International Telecommunication Union turns 150, Ban hails ‘resilience’ of oldest UN agency

17 May - Marking 150 years since founding of oldest member in the United Nations system, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today applauded the continued resilience and relevance of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), emphasizing that telecommunications – as well as information and communications technology (ICT) – drive innovation.

The ITU was established on 17 May 1865 with the signing of the first International Telegraph Convention and the day is observed annually as World Telecommunication and Information Society Day. This year, coinciding with the agency's 150th anniversary, the Day, which is on the theme 'Telecommunications and ICTs: Drivers of innovation,' will be marked by celebrations in some 50 countries around the world.

In addition to celebrations to be held in Geneva, where ITU is headquartered, a special ceremony is scheduled in Paris to mark the signing of the 1865 Telegraph Convention and another ceremony will be held in Madrid, attended by King Felipe VI of Spain, to commemorate the re-naming of the International Telegraph Union as the International Telecommunication Union in 1932.

“ITU has earned its global reputation for resilience and relevance,” said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a video message applauding the agency's many contributions as the oldest member in the United Nations system.

“Telecommunications – as well as information and communications technology – drive innovation,” Mr. Ban said. “The digital revolution has transformed our world. New information and communication technologies can help boost the economy and protect the environment.”

“This is a milestone year – the 150th anniversary of ITU, the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, and the potential starting year for transforming our world. Let us work together to harness the power of technology for our common future,” the UN chief declared.
ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao said on the occasion: “The remarkable history of ITU exemplifies its stellar role in connecting the world to the most advanced and innovative means of communication, from the days of the telegraph to the Internet and mobile broadband, which now allows us to be in touch anytime, anywhere with friends, family, colleagues and even things.”

“Throughout our 150-year history, we have promoted international cooperation, working to achieve practical solutions to integrate new communications technologies as they develop, spreading their benefits to all,” Mr. Zhao said.

This year, ITU 150 Awards are being launched to recognize individuals past and present from government, ICT industry, academia, and civil society that have contributed to improving lives of world citizens through ICT innovations in collaboration with ITU.

They are being awarded to:

- Martin Coopers, a pioneer in wireless communications and referred to as the 'father' of portable cellular telephony. He is an inventor, entrepreneur and futurist who conceived the first portable cellular phone in 1973. Cooper knew then that people needed the freedom that comes from anywhere, anytime telephony.
- Robert E. Kahn, who played a pioneering role in the development of the Internet. Kahn has developed the concept of a digital object architecture to provide a framework for interoperability of heterogeneous information systems and is the co-inventor of Knowbot programmes – mobile software agents in the network environment.
- Mark Krivocheev, best known for his pioneering work in forging a world television digital standard and for HDTV standards, which have made it possible for us to receive high quality sound and picture in our homes.
- Ken Sakamura, who designed the TRON open computer system architecture, which will be useful for ubiquitous computing of the future, and helped produce a series of Recommendations, including ITU-T H.642 "Multimedia information access triggered by tag-based identification", which is a critical element as we move to the age of the Internet of Things and Big Data.
- Thomas Wiegand, who has contributed significantly towards the standardization for multimedia and co-chaired for the development of the ITU-T H.264/MPEG-AVC video coding standard, which facilitates video streaming on mobile devices and was recognized with a Primetime Emmy Award from the Los Angeles-based Academy of Television Arts & Sciences.

ITU said Bill Gates will be given special recognition for his contributions and his ongoing work with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Together with its 193 Member States and a membership of over 700 private sector entities and academic institution, ITU is the inter-governmental responsible for coordinating the shared global use of the radio spectrum, promoting international cooperation in assigning satellite orbits, improving communication infrastructure in the developing world, and establishing the worldwide standards that foster seamless interconnection of a vast range of communications systems.

**‘Make the choice of service,’ UN chief tells Georgetown graduates**

16 May - In a commencement address at Georgetown University, where he received an honorary degree today, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told graduates to choose service, be bold, listen, champion progress and act with passion and compassion.

“Make the choice of service. There are many paths, including the one I chose: public service. What is important to remember is that history does not measure a person by his or her bank account. What counts is how much one gives back to the world,” Mr. Ban said in Washington, D.C., earlier today.

In its 70 year history, the United Nations has helped end wars and start progress in places where nearly all hope was lost. While the Organization has protected millions of people, repression continues. The ozone layer may have been saved but the threat of climate change looms.
“You have reached a pivotal moment in your lives. Our world is also at a crossroads,” he added.

Today, the world faces multiple tragic crises, from Syria to Yemen to South Sudan. There are more refugees – 50 million – than at any time since the end of the Second World War. Inequality is growing. Extremism is spreading, the Secretary-General explained.

“At the same time, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We face our best chance to end global poverty. We face our last chance to slow global warming,” he said.

When individuals serve others, they enrich themselves. When countries serve the global interest, they advance their own security.

“Thank you for this honorary degree. I humbly accept on behalf of the dedicated United Nations staff around the world who risk their lives for peace, development and human rights. This honour is for them,” Mr. Ban said.

“When I became UN Secretary-General, there were new issues to confront – including human rights for all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity,” he remembered.

While some may have wanted the UN chief to be quiet, he felt obliged to speak out because lives were at stake, he said.

“I stood with the LGBT members of the human family – and today same-sex partners at the United Nations enjoy equal rights. This year, the United Nations is working to champion progress across our agenda of peace, development and human rights,” he said.

In September, the United Nations will adopt a new sustainable development agenda to end poverty. In December, governments have promised to finally reach an ambitious agreement on climate change.

His biggest piece of advice to graduates: “Listen – listen most of all, to opposing views. In my time as Secretary-General, I have seen too many leaders turn a deaf ear to the voices and dreams of their people. It is as though they rule with noise-cancelling headphones.”

But listening is not just for leaders, Mr. Ban continued, it is just as important for average citizens to turn to each other with open minds and open ears. Yet, he feared that people are increasingly reluctant to hear dissonant voices.

Too many communities rush to point out an affront against them, but ignore the legitimate grievances of others, Mr. Ban said, urging the international community to close the ‘empathy gap’ that is so prevalent in our world today. “This is not an age for worlds of one. We must be one world – One world,” declared the UN chief.

“Today you receive your Georgetown diploma – one of the greatest accomplishments a young person can earn. You should be proud,” the Secretary-General concluded.
Security Council welcomes Central African Republic national forum, urges implementation of peace pact

16 May - The Security Council has welcomed the recent national reconciliation forum held in the Central African Republic (CAR) and the inclusive, grassroots-level manner in which the consultations were carried out, particularly by ensuring the participation of women, and called on the country's Transitional Authorities, with the support of the United Nations, to speedily implement the forum's outcomes.

The members of the Security Council, in a press statement issued yesterday evening, welcomed the holding in Bangui, from 4 to 11 May 2015, of the National Forum on reconciliation, and the inclusive grassroots level consultations that gathered views of local citizens in advance.

They welcomed the inclusive and comprehensive manner in which this Forum was held and commended the adoption of the Republican Pact for Peace, National Reconciliation and Reconstruction including, among others, commitments for a swift presidential and legislative electoral process, decentralization and a reinforced judiciary.

The Council further commended the signature of an agreement on the principles for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as an agreement by which armed groups committed to end the recruitment of child soldiers and liberate all children associated with the conflict from their ranks. In this regard, the Council welcomed the release of more than 300 children, including several under 12 years old, by anti-Balaka and the ex-Seleka armed group.

Congratulating the people of the Central African Republic, the Transitional Authorities, and the armed groups who participated as signatories of these critical agreements, the Council called on all armed groups to follow through on these commitments without delay.

The Security Council reiterated its support to the Transitional Authorities under the leadership of Catherine Samba-Panza as Transitional Head of State and strongly condemned the attempt by some armed elements to use violence, including directed against peacekeepers of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) in the country, at the closing of the Bangui Forum.

The members of the Security Council urged the Transitional Authorities, with the support of the United Nations and the international community, to implement the Forum's recommendations without delay, said the press statement.

The Council also urged, in particular, the Transitional Authorities, as well as the National Elections Authority (NEA), in accordance with the transitional national charter and the 'Pacte Républicain' adopted at the Bangui Forum, to organize as a matter of urgency over the whole territory, the Constitutional referendum and the free, fair, transparent and inclusive presidential and legislative elections currently scheduled to take place by August 2015, ensuring the full and effective participation of women, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and CAR refugees, the voluntary return of whom should be an important objective.

In its press statement the Council called on UN Member States, international and regional organizations to urgently provide support to the Transitional Authorities for the conduct of the transition and subsequent reforms, including voluntary contributions for the payment of salaries and other needs for the restoration of the State authority over the whole territory, as well as for the holding of elections through the UN trust fund, for the upcoming disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDR/R) and security sector reform (SSR) programmes and for the restoration of the judiciary and the criminal justice system including the Special Criminal Court.
UN expert calls for adoption of minimum set of fundamental human rights for detainees

18 May - The top United Nations human rights expert on torture today called for the adoption of the revised Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, which are being considered this week by the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Vienna.

The revised Rules contain a number of practical elements that provide detainees with increased protection from torture and other ill-treatment, such as a specific prohibition on the use of prolonged solitary confinement, which is defined as that exceeding 15 days.

“The time is now to adopt the revised Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners; anything less would send a negative signal to the international community,” Mr. Juan E. Méndez cautioned in an Open Letter to the UN Commission.

“The adoption and implementation of these rules reinforces human rights principles and provides greater protection for persons deprived of their liberty, updated procedural safeguards, and more effective guidance to national prison administrations,” he explained in a statement issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The revised Rules also include safeguards such as the recognition of the prohibition of torture and other cruel or degrading treatment, and independent healthcare professionals who have a duty to refrain from participating in torture, and have a role in detecting such ill-treatment.

“Regrettably, there is a lack of guidance on the use of force in the revised Rules which gives rise to the risk that excessive force may be used by prison guards and which, under appropriate circumstances, constitutes cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment,” Mr. Méndez said.

The adoption of a resolution during the 24th session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, informally known as the Crime Commission, will enable the revised Rules to proceed forward and be considered by the UN General Assembly in December 2015.

Juan E. Méndez was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council as the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in November 2010. He is independent from any government and serves in his individual capacity.

Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system. They work on a voluntary basis, are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work.
UN anti-crime chief opens Crime Commission urging action to prevent migrant smuggling

18 May - The top United Nations official involved in the Organization’s fight against illegal drugs and international crime said today how horrified he was when he first heard the news of migrants dying when their boats sank in the Mediterranean – “the latest reports of a tragedy seemingly without end.”

“Since then,” said Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), “thousands more migrants and refugees have died all over the world, on treacherous journeys to reach their destinations, often at the hands of criminal smuggling groups. We cannot let this situation continue.”

In his opening speech at the 24th Session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), the UNODC chief said news of the deaths had broken during the 13th Crime Congress in Doha in April this year.

Mr. Fedotov referred to efforts made by the Government of Italy to protect migrants while simultaneously combating migrant smuggling and he said the experiences showed that the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, and its protocol on migrant smuggling, can be effective against the smuggling networks that exploit migrants.

He described how migrant smuggling cuts across borders and is intimately linked with peace and security, human rights and development, and he said UNODC would support Governments efforts through the agency’s integrated, inter-regional approaches to tackling it along with other challenges.

“Our policies must be coherent,” the Executive Director said. “Our responses integrated and inclusive, uniting countries of origin, transit and destination, based on the principle of shared responsibility.”

The 24th Session of the Commission runs from 18 to 22 May in Vienna and attracts around 1,000 representatives of Member States and civil society. During the five days of the Crime Commission there will be one special event on foreign terrorist fighters, around nine draft resolutions, more than 30 side events and a series of exhibitions.

Other speakers at the opening included Luis Alfonso de Alba, the Mexican Ambassador and Chairperson of the 24th Session of the Commission, and Sheila Abed, the Minister of Justice of Paraguay.

In Republic of Korea, UN’s Ban says education key for global peace and stability

18 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has returned to his native Republic of Korea (ROK) for the first time in two years in order to attend a series of international events, including a critical summit on education and development, the United Nations confirmed today.

In remarks to the press, the Secretary-General noted that he had arrived in the city of Incheon in order to attend the World Education Forum jointly hosted by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Korean government.

“Education tops the global agenda for peace and stability and development in the world,” explained Mr. Ban as he addressed reporters. “At the [World Education Forum], world’s
education leaders, the Korean government and the UN will discuss how education will lead to world peace and development.”

The Secretary-General also observed that he would attend a range of other UN events, including the UN Global Compact and Academic Impact, as well as events aimed at facilitating discussion on regional peace and development of information and communications technology.

Mr. Ban's five-day visit to the ROK comes at a particularly propitious time as both the UN and the Asian state prepare to mark their respective 70th anniversaries.

He added that he would attend the event celebrating the UN's anniversary but, “most importantly,” would pay a courtesy call to President Park Geun-hye and talk about “how to achieve peace on the Korean peninsula and how the Republic of Korea can contribute to world peace, stability and development.”

At the same time, the Secretary-General is also scheduled to meet with Speaker of the National Assembly Chung Ui-hwa and other leaders from the National Assembly as well as Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se in order to discuss Korea-UN cooperation and UN-Korea relations.

UNESCO chief condemns killing of Bangladeshi blogger Ananta Bijoy Das

18 May - The head of the United Nations agency with a mandate to defend freedom of expression and press freedom worldwide today voiced grave concern about the safety of citizen journalists in Bangladesh following the killing of blogger Ananta Bijoy Das on 12 May.

“I condemn the murder of Ananta Bijoy Das and call on the authorities to ensure that those responsible for this killing are brought to justice,” said UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova, in a statement from Paris.

“Punishing such attacks is indispensable to maintain free public debate and free expression by media professionals and committed citizens alike,” Ms. Bokova added.

Ms. Das, 33, was killed by four masked men on a street in the northeastern city of Sylhet in broad daylight. The blogger had contributed to the Mukto-Mona (Free Thought) website created by Avijit Roy, a United States blogger of Bangladeshi origin, who was murdered during a visit to Dhaka on 26 February. Ms. Das also wrote for the quarterly Jukti (Logic).

The Director-General of UNESCO issues statements on the killing of media workers in line with Resolution 29 adopted by UNESCO Member States at the Organization's General Conference of 1997, entitled “Condemnation of Violence against Journalists.”

These statements are posted on a dedicated webpage, UNESCO condemns the killing of journalists.