Ban praises Slovakia and Austria for 'taking care of so many refugees'

19 October - While visiting a humanitarian centre in Slovakia today where refugees have been accommodated by the Government, United Nations Secretary-General urged all leaders to show their “global solidarity and compassionate leadership.”

“I really appreciate the Slovak Government for establishing this emergency transit centre,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told reporters in Gabcíkovo, a municipality situated on the border with Hungary.

He thanked the governments of Slovakia and Austria “for their very kind and warm hearts taking care of so many refugees who are voiceless and defenceless and helpless at this time,” adding that the migrant and refugee issues have become a global challenge.

“I know that each and every country has very serious political, economic, social challenges in accommodating these people but at the same time they should know that they are people who are fleeing war and persecution and very difficult hardship which they can never bear themselves,” Mr. Ban continued.

While highlighting that the current crisis may be a huge challenge in terms of numbers – with tens of thousands of people “rushing to the European continent” – the UN chief said he believes that it is not simply a “crisis of number,” but rather a “crisis of global solidarity.”
He noted that European leaders have been working “very seriously and closely” with plans to meet in the middle of November in Valletta, Malta, to discuss the matter.

“Again, I am urging all the leaders of concerned countries to show their leadership and warm hearts for those people,” he stressed. “Let us work together so that they will be able to return to their country one day, wherever they may be coming from.”

He reiterated that he is grateful for the Austrian Government “for not blocking any refugees [but] instead showing great flexibility so that they can freely transit to wherever their destination may be.”

Mr. Ban concluded that as far as the United Nations is concerned, the number one priority is protecting human lives and providing life-saving support.

**UN and partners deliver critical relief supplies to besieged areas of Syria**

**19 October** - A joint United Nations, International Red Cross (ICRC) and Syrian Arab Red Crescent operation delivered on Sunday essential medical and humanitarian supplies to 30,000 people in the Fouah and Kefrayah in Idlib governorate and Zabadani and Madaya in the Rural Damascus governorate, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“Yesterday’s mission was critical as it allowed humanitarian actors to reach thousands of people in these besieged and hard to reach locations with the needed assistance,” said OCHA in a press release.

The number of people reached is expected to rise to 40,000 in the next 48 hours. The joint operation was made possible by the framework of the Zabadani/Fouah and Kefrayah ceasefire agreement, which was reached in Istanbul in September, with the facilitation of the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria.

The humanitarian and medical supplies to Zabadani and surrounding towns were delivered from Damascus, while deliveries to Foah and Kefrayah were made from UN stocks in Southern Turkey in line with Security Council resolutions 2165 and 2191, which authorized UN agencies and their partners to deliver cross-border humanitarian assistance to people inside Syria.

OCHA said that the UN and its partners now “look forward to the implementation of the remaining points covered under the agreement including the urgent evacuation of the critically wounded,” noting that the UN called on the relevant parties “to facilitate these urgent life-saving and humanitarian actions.”
Central African Republic: UN police ambushed, illegally detained by armed group

19 October - Seven United Nations police were ambushed and illegally detained by armed elements Sunday evening in a province near the Central African Republic (CAR) capital of Bangui, according to reports from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission there (MINUSCA).

The police were held near Boali in the Ombella Mpoko prefecture in the country’s southwest, allegedly by anti-Balaka elements. All police were freed the same night, but without their equipment and weapons, UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said at today’s regular briefing at UN Headquarters.

Also, in a separate incident yesterday, a MINUSCA position in Damara, also in Ombella Mpoko, was fired upon by three unknown armed men. Peacekeepers returned fire, killing one assailant and seizing a number of weapons, said Mr. Dujarric. Two of the assailants managed to escape.

The spokesperson said that “The Mission strongly condemns attacks against its peacekeepers and calls for swift action to bring the perpetrators in both crimes to justice.”

“The Mission underlines that attacks targeting peacekeepers may constitute a war crime and reminds all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law,” he added.

Mr. Dujarric also noted that the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien, will be travelling to CAR tomorrow to take stock of the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

During his visit, he hopes to meet displaced people in Bangui and in Dekoa in Kémo province, and is expected to meet President Catherine Samba-Panza and other senior officials and representatives of the humanitarian community to discuss challenges in delivering assistance and ways of improving response to those affected by the crisis.

MINUSCA, set up in April 2014 to help bring peace after a breakdown of governmental authority and vicious intercommunal fighting between mainly the Muslim Séléka group and the mainly Christian anti-Balaka movement, currently maintains nearly 11,000 uniformed personnel in the country, one of the world’s poorest.
Global event to turn world ‘UN blue’ to mark 70th anniversary of United Nations

19 October - Ahead of UN Day, marked annually on 24 October, the United Nations announced today that around 200 iconic monuments, buildings, museums, bridges and other landmarks in nearly 60 countries around the world will be lit up blue – the official colour of the Organization – as part of a global campaign to commemorate its 70th anniversary.

“This is an initiative led by the [UN Department of Public Information] and has had tremendous support from governments, cities, mayors, and locally in many countries [from] information centres, to ensure this collaborative public awareness of the UN Day,” Under-Secretary-General for Public Information Cristina Gallach told reporters at a press conference in New York.

Ms. Gallach said iconic landmarks – from Australia’s Sydney Opera House to the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt and from the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro to the Empire State Building in New York – will be lit blue. Other sites will include Russia’s Hermitage Museum, the ancient city of Petra in Jordan, the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy, Edinburgh Castle and Westminster Hall in the United Kingdom, Table Mountain in South Africa, Japan’s SkyTree Tower and the Alhambra in Spain, among many others.

“I am grateful our Member States are showing such strong enthusiasm in marking 70 years of UN support for peace, development and human rights,” said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a press release.

“By turning the world UN Blue for a day, we can light the way to a better tomorrow,” he added.

The global celebration will kick off in New Zealand and then Australia with the lighting of the Sydney Opera House at dusk, and from there, a wave of UN blue will move across countries and continents as monuments around the world take part in the international event.

United Nations Headquarters in New York will light up for two nights, beginning on Friday when the annual UN Day concert will be held, sponsored by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea.

The lead performers are the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) Symphony Orchestra; they will be joined on stage by UN Messenger of Peace Lang Lang, the Harlem Gospel Choir and K-Pop duo Davichi.

Meanwhile, on Saturday afternoon in New York City’s Central Park, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the President of the General Assembly, Mogens Lykketoft will attend the unveiling of a new art installation dedicated to the United Nations.

Created by Spanish artist Cristóbal Gabarrón, Enlightened Universe features 70 life-size figures – representing the 70 years of the Organization – joined hand in hand around a huge globe. The figures are designed to represent a human chain of global citizens, joined in solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility.
UN agencies expand operations in southern Africa as poor harvests deepen food insecurity

19 October - An estimated 27.4 million people in southern Africa face food insecurity in the next six months, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warned today, announcing the expansion of their operations to respond to the challenge, caused by poor harvests across the region.

In a press statement issued today from Johannesburg, South Africa, the UN agencies cited poor harvests experienced by farmers across the region, which will negatively impact the capacity of vulnerable farmers to purchase seeds, fertilizer and other necessities for the current planting season.

According to the latest update from the Southern Africa Food and Nutrition Working Group, the region faces the risk of another poor monsoon and harvest resulting in 'significant increase in food and nutrition insecurity in the region.'

Lesotho and southern parts of Angola and Mozambique face food insecurity. Areas facing immediate threats are Malawi, Zimbabwe and Madagascar, where severe crop failure due to extended dry spells, extensive flooding and impactful tropical storms have resulted in increasing food insecurity.

Malawi is experiencing the worst food insecurity in a decade with nearly 2.8 million people reported to be food insecure.

WFP is planning to assist 2.4 million food-insecure people during the height of the lean season, the period prior to the next harvest when domestic food stocks become depleted.

The agency says it also plans to implement social protection plans such as food assistance with cash transfers and have already assisted nearly one million people who have been affected by floods.

FAO has supported the Government of Malawi in preparing the agricultural section of the national food insecurity response plan.

This would include provision of inputs, with an emphasis on drought-tolerant crops such as cassava, sweet potatoes, sorghum and millet and on supplementary irrigation in order to cope with potential prolonged dry spells.

The agencies report that in Zimbabwe, an estimated 1.5 million people are expected to be food insecure in the coming months after harvests were down by 50 per cent than last year.

FAO is working with the Government to rehabilitate 34 irrigation schemes and increasing rural finance access to 127,000 smallholder farmers to adopt climate smart technologies.

The agency is also providing support to 40,000 smallholder households to engage in commercial livestock production and assisting in distributing vaccines for the foot and mouth disease outbreak in the country.

FAO has also prepared a drought mitigation programme, for which there is a financial gap of US $32 million to support livestock and crop farmers with stock feed and seeds respectively, in the most affected parts of the country.

WFP plans to assist the Government and partners by providing cash and food transfers to over 400,000 vulnerable people which could scale up to 850,000 people during lean season.

Both agencies focus on building resilience in southern Africa by promoting and supporting climate smart technologies,
social protection schemes, refurbishing and construction of water management systems, tree planting and terracing to prevent soil erosion.

The agencies report that food prices may soar early in the season which could cause further hardship for poorer households.

Both FAO and WFP have reaffirmed to collectively help the governments in the impacted countries improve food price monitoring.

Lastly, the UN agencies report that along with food security, the region faces the highest level of chronic malnutrition in children and HIV prevalence in adults.

**Economic and Social Council ‘stands ready’ to lead on achieving goals of UN 2030 Agenda, says President**

**19 October** - The President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) today highlighted key messages and results drawn from the Council’s 2015 session and called for comprehensive and integrated policies to effectively achieve the recently adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as he presented the body’s annual report to the UN member States.

“Integrated and inclusive approaches to achieving our ambitious agenda will require strong institutions, broad-based partnerships, robust implementation plans, and thorough follow-up and review,” said Oh Joon in his address to the UN General Assembly.

Mr. Oh also added that besides the key recommendations, successfully achieving the aims of the Sustainable Development Goals would urgently require Member States to formulate integrated policies that foster balanced consideration of economic, social and environmental issues, ensuring synergies across multiple sectors.

The President also highlighted the broad range of themes examined by the 54-member Council during “this highly productive and significant year,” such as convening dialogues on the future of the UN development system and the readiness of its operational activities; applying the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development to employment creation; advancing financing for development; and strengthening the coordination of the humanitarian assistance of the UN.

He also highlighted other activities undertaken by ECOSOC, such as considering the role and features of multi-stakeholder partnerships in implementing the 2030 Agenda and incorporating youth perspectives in the international dialogue on development.

Mr. Oh also added that at the 2015 High-level Segment of ECOSOC, which included the three-day Ministerial meeting of the High-Level Political Forum, significant contributions were made to ensure smoother transition of the Council to the new 2030 Agenda.

He further said that the new 2016 session will be crucial for ECOSOC as the Council leads in the global implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda.

“The ECOSOC forum on financing for development follow-up and review, mandated by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, will be convened for the first time during this session. It will include the special high-level meeting of the Council with the World Bank, the [International Monetary Fund], [World Trade Organization] and the [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development],” said Mr. Oh.

Lastly, the President said that the 2016 annual theme ‘Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Moving from commitments to results’ is a reaffirmation of the Council’s commitment in tackling the challenges and effectively implementing the goals of the Agenda 2030.

“ECOSOC is committed to supporting Member States in this policy integration effort, and in the implementation of the 2030
Agenda. I can assure you that the entire ECOSOC system, including the functional and regional commissions, committees, and expert bodies, is mobilized towards this end,” said Mr. Oh.

Yemen: UN envoy completes visit to Saudi Arabia as part of efforts to secure peace

19 October - The United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen today concluded a visit to Saudi Arabia before his briefing to the Security Council this week on his preparations for peace talks that he hopes will “lead to concrete benefits for the Yemeni people and the foundation for sustainable peace.”

The Special Envoy also welcomed the statement Sunday by the officials of the Government of Yemen in which they expressed their willingness to participate in peace talks with the Houthis.

“In the coming weeks, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed will be working with Government representatives, the Houthis and their allies, to complete preparations for the talks, which will help ensure that the negotiations lead to concrete benefits for the Yemeni people and the foundation for sustainable peace,” UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told the daily press briefing at UN Headquarters in New York.

While in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, the envoy, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, met with Yemen’s President Mansour Hadi and Vice-President Khaled Bahah, as well as key Saudi officials including Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef Bin Abdelaziz Al Saud, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud and Minister for Foreign Affairs Adel al-Jubeir.

In addition, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed met representatives of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and representatives of the diplomatic community in Riyadh during his three-day visit.

The envoy will be in New York this week to brief the 15-member UN Security Council on Wednesday on the latest updates and hold bilateral meetings with relevant parties.

In the most recent resolution on Yemen, the Council demanded that the Houthis withdraw from all areas seized during the latest conflict, relinquish arms seized from military and security institutions, cease all actions falling exclusively within the authority of the legitimate Yemeni Government and fully implement previous Council resolutions.

Ban inaugurates exhibition on UN’s 70th anniversary, meets with students in Slovak capital

19 October - During a visit to the capital of Slovakia today, the United Nations Secretary-General inaugurated an exhibition commemorating the 70th anniversary of Organization, featured at the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

“When the United Nations was first established, it was an enormous gamble based on hope,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told those attending the ceremony in Bratislava.

“The world was in ruins. The founders of the United Nations knew that they had to do more than rebuild the bombed-out buildings with bricks; they had to build a lasting institution based on universal ideals,” he continued.

Mr. Ban pointed out that one of those founders was the Slovak diplomat Jan Papanek, who showed “great courage” throughout his career. “I have been deeply inspired by him as I studied for my visit to the Slovak Republic,” Mr. Ban revealed.

Speaking about the photographs on display, the UN chief said they capture “the very intense time when the world came
together following global tragedy to forge an institution that could turn the lessons of war into a service for peace.”

“I am moved by these displays, which give us a sense of what it was like at the birth of this great Organization,” he stated, adding that the exhibition is a “powerful reminder” of how the UN was established and how much it has progressed since.

“For one thing, there are now many distinguished Slovak women working as diplomats, too!” he exclaimed.

Mr. Ban further noted that the dramatic events in the world now “show how important the United Nations remains today,” and that the global community has reached a “pivotal” moment in history.

“The United Nations has saved countless lives – but wars still rage. Displacement is higher than at any time since the Second World War. The dangers are serious – but the world is responding,” he insisted, mentioning the new the new Sustainable Development Goals which aim to create a life of dignity for all people by 2030.

Earlier today, the Secretary-General visited Comenius University, the oldest and largest university in the Slovak Republic, which presented him with an Honorary Doctorate and Gold Medal.

“This is a reflection of your esteem for the United Nations,” Mr. Ban said upon receiving the award. “I accept on behalf of its global staff. They are the UN's heart and soul, and I attribute all honours I receive to them.”

He also met with students from the school's Karol Rybárik International Relations Institute, whom he described as a “new generation of young people” raised in independent Slovakia.

“As students of diplomacy, you may go out in the world and represent your country,” he told them. “In this effort, I hope that you will always consider how the national interest and the global interest converge.”

Later, Mr. Ban visited the University's Library, where he saw the Basagic's Collection of Islamic Manuscripts.

“These very rare and valuable documents show the development of Islamic civilization over more than a thousand years,” he noted. “The fact that they are treasured here shows this University's respect for the importance of Islam in history.”

**Despite progress, road traffic crashes still take ‘unacceptable’ annual toll – UN health agency**

19 October - Road traffic crashes are a leading cause of death globally and result in some 1.25 million deaths each year, taking an “unacceptable toll – particularly on poor people in poor countries,” the World Health Organization (WHO) said in a report released today.

WHO’s Global status report on road safety 2015 also calls for “urgent action” to achieve the ambitious target in the newly adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to halve the global number of deaths and injuries from road traffic crashes by 2020.

The report also noted that “a big gap still separates high-income countries from low- and middle-income ones where 90 per cent of road traffic deaths occur in spite of having just 54 per cent of the world’s vehicles.” Europe has the lowest death rates per capita; Africa the highest.

“Road traffic fatalities take an unacceptable toll – particularly on poor people in poor countries,” says Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of WHO.

The report also found that some vehicles sold in 80 per cent of all countries worldwide fail to meet basic safety standards, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where nearly 50 per cent of the 67 million new passenger cars were produced in 2014.
But on a positive note, the report said the number of road traffic deaths is stabilizing even though the number of motor vehicles worldwide has increased rapidly.

“In the last three years, 79 countries have seen a decrease in the absolute number of fatalities while 68 countries have seen an increase,” it said.

According to WHO, countries that have had the most success in reducing the number of road traffic deaths have achieved this by improving legislation, enforcement, and making roads and vehicles safer.

“We’re moving in the right direction,” said Dr. Chan. “The report shows that road safety strategies are saving lives. But it also tells us that the pace of change is too slow.”

The Global status report on road safety 2015 comprises a narrative text combining evidence, facts and best practices with conclusions drawn following the analysis of the data collected for 180 countries.

Its publication today precedes the 2nd Global High-Level Conference on Road Safety that will be held in Brasilia, Brazil, 18-19 November 2015.

**UN report calls for urgent response to harness Asia-Pacific’s rapid urban transformation**

19 October - Warning of unprecedented shifts in population in urban areas of the Asia and Pacific – already home to 17 of the world’s megacities, with populations exceeding 10 million – the United Nations today launched a new report that highlights the region’s urban transformation progress and underscores the urgent need to make it more sustainable.

“Urban demographics will magnify our challenges, as they accompany steeper growth in national outputs, which already outpace population growth. Growing demand will increase policy and resource pressures, as our cities will be home to a middle class of 2 billion people by 2050, said Shamshad Akhtar, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

The report, State of Asian and Pacific Cities 2015: Urban Transformations’ shifting from quantity to quality, compiled by ESCAP and the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN HABITAT), highlights growing gaps between current urbanization patterns and what is needed to shift to a more inclusive and sustainable urban future, in which the role of the region’s cities is unquestionably tied to national, regional and global development prospects.

Launched during the Sixth Asian Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-6), taking place in Jakarta, Indonesia, the report states that in 2018 the region will have more than half of its population is expected to then be living in urban agglomerations. Additionally, a further one billion people will be added to the region’s cities by 2040 and by 2050 the urban population in Asia and the Pacific will reach 3.2 billion.

Currently, the region is home to 17 megacities, each of which exceeds 10 million inhabitants. According to the report, the region will have 22 megacities by 2030.

The report states that the current economic dynamism in the region’s urban areas that has spurred a rise in the size of middle classes still witnesses widening gaps and growing inequalities.

Youth employments, rising number of urban poor, lack of rights, rising urban living costs, lack of access to adequate services and housing are some of the challenges facing the urban population.

Widening disparities threaten to undermine social cohesion, and affordability is at a crisis point in many of the region’s larger cities.
The report also highlights the environmental challenges facing the urban cities of Asia-Pacific where an increasing number of cities face liveability crises, evidenced by deteriorating air standards and water pollution. They are also highly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change activities with poor and disadvantaged communities being more at risk.

“Our region has demonstrated, in a range of cities, how sound leadership, sustainability and financial capacity can catalyse the essential change that we need. We must address the power-sharing gaps between local and central government; the financing gaps in local government budgets and investment; and the capacity gaps of local governments in promoting strategic and future-oriented urban planning,” said Ms. Akhtar.

The report also stressed that the recently adopted 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the world leaders at the UN General Assembly provides a broad architecture to tackle these challenges as it includes a dedicated Sustainable Development Goal and several other Goals that supports sustainable urban transformation.

“The need for strong leadership and political commitment, both at the national and subnational levels, to gear up responses, learn and adapt from the region’s successful stories of urban transformations, and deploy innovation and newer technologies, strengthening local governance institutions and working more closely with private sector to manage urbanization,” said Ms. Akhtar.

Philippines: lauding Government’s storm preparedness, UN agencies ready to assist in wake of typhoon

19 October - As slow-moving Typhoon Koppu brought intense rains and flooding to the Philippines that forced tens of thousands from their homes, the United Nations today lauded the storm-prone country’s early preparedness efforts as having minimized damage to life and property, with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) nevertheless expressing concern for children stranded in remote areas.

After the typhoon made landfall Sunday morning, UNICEF and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) noted that the Government’s preparedness programme had paid off.

The head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Margareta Wahlström, praised the Philippines Government for its efforts to reduce mortality and the numbers of people affected by the typhoon.

“The communication of early warnings in the Philippines has improved significantly since Typhoon Haiyan claimed over 6,000 lives in November 2013. Last December, major loss of life was averted by large-scale evacuations in the face of Typhoon Hagupit,” said Ms. Wahlström in a press release.

“Now again this weekend, Government agencies have been successful in reducing loss of life through the effective communication of early warnings and organizing targeted evacuations in the areas most affected by Typhoon Koppu,” she continued. “President Benigno Aquino’s broadcast to the nation on Friday evening was especially important in alerting the population to the threat.”

Ms. Wahlström also noted that regular updates from weather bureau PAGASA and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council had helped guide the actions of local governments, the private sector, the Red Cross and others.

“The Philippines is the most storm-exposed country in the world and its expertise in disaster risk management can be usefully adopted by other countries trying to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction adopted in March this year as a global blueprint for reducing disaster losses,” she added.

UNICEF also praised the country’s actions in preparation for the typhoon.

“UNICEF notes that the government’s preparedness and early action in pre-emptive evacuation and widespread public
information have minimized damage to life and property,” the UN agency said in a statement. “UNICEF also activated its emergency preparedness measures days before the typhoon struck the archipelago. In any disaster, children are the most vulnerable.”

UNICEF said that, according to Government reports, 55,554 people have been evacuated due to the typhoon, and more than 12,125 families are staying in 136 evacuation centres. Assessments will continue in the coming week to confirm numbers and the full extent of the typhoon’s impact, said UNICEF.

“UNICEF’s first priority is to ensure children are safe and protected. Following a typhoon, children face risks from contaminated water sources, lack of food, epidemics such as cholera, hypothermia, diarrhea and pneumonia,” UNICEF Philippines Representative Lotta Sylwander said.

UNICEF is appealing for $2.8 million to replenish its supplies; Typhoon Koppu, it notes, is the twelfth tropical cyclone to enter the Philippines this year, and the country usually experiences over 20 typhoons a year. This year is predicted to bring more intense typhoons as a result of El Niño. “There is already another Typhoon, Champi, looming on the Philippines.”

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) released a regional statement on El Niño and its potential impact on Pacific Islands, noting that the weather phenomenon “will continue to have a significant influence on the climate and ocean in most parts of the Pacific Islands region for the remainder of 2015 and much of 2016.”

The organization noted that the “risk of a typhoon in the western and central north Pacific is above normal for the remainder of 2015,” adding that the islands will have a high risk of “serious effects from some combination of high winds, storm surges, large waves, and/or extreme rainfall associated with a typhoon.”

WMO also said that tropical cyclone numbers “are expected to be elevated for a majority of the Pacific Island countries close to or east of the International Date Line, and their tracks may be less predictable.”

It noted that “drier than normal conditions are already being experienced in parts of the southwest Pacific and north Pacific. These conditions are likely to continue for several months. It is likely that some of these locations will experience a prolonged drought in the year ahead. In contrast, above normal rainfall is likely to continue in the central equatorial Pacific.”

Changes in sea level are also likely to occur, as well as a heightened risk of coral bleaching, and impacts on drinking water supplies.

In Slovakia, Ban highlights importance of 'living harmoniously' and sustainably

19 October - Visiting the Slovakian city of Levoca, the United Nations Secretary-General stressed the importance of the role of the local community, particularly mayors and governors, and the importance of living harmoniously and in a sustainable way.

“I am honoured and pleased to visit this historic city of Levoca, and I’d like to thank you for all your efforts to preserve this historical culture and heritage, and civilization and proud history of your country,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told reporters at the town’s City Hall.

“That is why UNESCO [UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] has designated this historic city, Levoca, as world cultural heritage site,” he added.

The UN chief said he was “deeply impressed” while entering the city due to the many historical buildings, properties and assets.

“These may belong to your citizens and city but I believe that these are common heritage of humanity,” he continued. “Therefore, it would be very important to preserve all these cultural heritage and assets, and your proud history.”

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During his brief visit to Levoca, Mr. Ban also noted that he was “very much inspired by such a stunning beauty and history,” and said he hopes the many people who visit will also be inspired.

“Taking this opportunity I'd like to stress the importance of the role of the local community, particularly mayors and governors, and the importance of living harmoniously and in a sustainable way,” he declared, recalling that three weeks ago, the Foreign Minister of Slovakia, Miroslav Lajcak, with whom he met with on Sunday, came to the United Nations and adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) alongside all world leaders.

These goals are part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to wipe out poverty, fight inequality and tackle climate change over the next 15 years.

“I hope you will 'own' these Sustainable Development Goals as your city's Sustainable Development Goals and implement them,” Mr. Ban told the city's Mayor. “It is important to take all necessary measures to address climate change, which may affect your own city and country.”

“Let's work together to make this world and your country better for all,” the Secretary-General concluded.

Earlier on Sunday, Mr. Ban also met with the President of Slovakia, Andrej Kiska.

**Libya: Security Council urges parties to endorse and sign political agreement**

17 October - Recalling their statement last week which commended Libyan dialogue participants on finalizing a political agreement for the creation of a Government of National Accord, members of the UN Security Council today urged all Libyan parties to endorse and sign it.

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 facilitated by UN Special Representative Bernardino León, it was announced last week that a national unity government could be proposed, which included Fayez Sarraj for the position of Prime Minister. He is current a Member of Parliament at the House of Representatives from Tripoli.

In a statement issued today, the members of the Security Council stressed that “the Agreement offers a real prospect for resolving Libya's political, security, and institutional crises.”

They also noted that the Libya Sanctions Committee “is prepared to designate those who threaten Libya's peace, stability and security or who undermine the successful completion of its political transition,” while reaffirming their strong commitment to the “sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya.”
'I am standing with these refugees,' says Ban visiting reception centre in Rome

**17 October** - After meeting with families of refugees at a reception centre in Italy today, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the global community has to “stand with people who do not have any means” and provide basic necessities, such as education and sanitation.

“Having met all these family members – children and women – I was very much saddened but I was also very much heartened by the stories they told me,” Mr. Ban told reporters at the Centre Tenda Di Abramo in Rome.

“The stories were heart-breaking but at the same time, I really wanted to give them a sense of hope,” he added, noting that the warmth shown by the Italian people and others around the world and in Europe has been “very kind.”

Mr. Ban said he knows that European countries are facing many challenges, but insisted that this is not a “crisis of numbers.”

“If there is any crisis, this is a crisis of global solidarity,” he underlined. “If they show global solidarity, compassionate leadership, as the same human being, I think there is nothing that we cannot overcome.”

As a first measure, the UN chief said it is important to give refugees life-saving support, such as education and sanitation, which as basic necessities “that every human being needs.”

He also highlighted his gratefulness of the support given by many European leaders and countries, and by people.

“I am standing with these refugees,” Mr. Ban declared. “I am standing with so many volunteers who have been working hard, tirelessly, day and night. I am standing with many educators, teachers, philanthropists, who have been showing great humanity. But most of all, we have to stand with those people who do not have any means.”

During his visit, the Secretary-General said he met about fifty or sixty children, and that this was the most moving to him.

“When I was six years old, I myself was one of them. It was 65 years ago. When [the] Korean War broke out, I had to flee my village to a safer place, even though it was very remote. At that time, I did not know what politics was about. I only knew that I was hungry and needed something to eat,” he explained.

He also shared that he stills vividly recollects memories of his his father and grandfather desperately looking for something to feed him and his siblings.

“At that time, the United Nations came - the blue flag of the United Nations. That was a beacon of hope. They saved us,” Mr. Ban recalled.

“I am sure that one of these refugees, one day, overcoming all of these difficulties may be Secretary-General of the United Nations in the future. They can be government and community leaders. They have great potential. The potential of refugees should be fully utilized. If they are supported, they can be honourable and very talented contributors to your societies.”
The Secretary-General also highlighted that the UN is mobilizing all necessary resources, which he said is why he convened a summit meeting on migration and refugees in September on the margins of the General Assembly.

“Many European Presidents and Prime Ministers participated and I urged them to please show compassionate leadership,” he said. “This is an era of global solidarity.”

He further recalled that when Pope Francis came to the United Nations last month, he spoke to the leaders of the world. “If I may quote him, he said: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' That was most fitting and inspiring, especially at this time.”

Concluding his remarks, Mr. Ban said he counts on the compassionate leadership of leaders around the world.

### Welcoming Myanmar ceasefire, UNICEF says accord must cover 'every child, wherever they live'

19 October - While the recent ceasefire agreement between the Government of Myanmar and representatives of eight ethnic armed groups marks an historic step for children in Myanmar who have suffered from some of the longest running civil conflicts in the world, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) remains concerned for an estimated 1.8 million children who are not covered by the accord.

In a statement, UNICEF welcomed the signed agreement that gives high priority to the protection of children in armed conflict, noting that the agreement is “opening the door for a favourable environment in which children can grow and develop, and benefit from the same opportunities as other children in Myanmar.”

According to UNICEF, it particularly calls on parties to stop grave violations against children, including their use and recruitment in the armed forces, attacks on schools and rights to receive humanitarian assistance.

“The ceasefire agreement provides a useful framework that will help accelerate all actions to protect children in armed conflict, making all signatories more accountable and, thus, serving as a game-changer for children living in the areas affected by conflict between the signatories and the Tatmadaw,” said UNICEF.

The lives of millions of children in Myanmar have been affected by these conflicts with the disruption of basic services, such as immunization and education, as well as increased risk of recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups.

However, the agreement does not cover all children, particularly those living in violent situations in Kachin and northern Shan, where continuing conflicts prevent them from accessing basic services.

UNICEF urged all parties still engaged in hostilities to “make every effort to end conflict and promote peace and development so that every child, wherever they live, can grow up in a united, peaceful and prosperous Myanmar.”

The agency has been working with the Government and people of Myanmar since 1950. In partnership with the Government and the civil society, its current focus of work aims to reduce child mortality; improve access and quality of education; and protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation.
UN expert warns that despite Mali's progress, ‘precarious security situation’ endangers human rights

19 October - Wrapping up his recent visit to Mali, a United Nations independent expert noted positive developments on the ground but stressed that the “precarious security situation” creates an environment in which violation so of the most fundamental human rights can still occur.

“The Agreement on peace and reconciliation and the extension of the mandate of MINUSMA [UN Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission] are encouraging signs,” said Suliman Baldo, the Independent Expert on human rights in the country, on the final day of his 10-19 October visit.

“I call the various parties to seize this opportunity to establish a lasting peace, with respect for everyone’s rights,” he added.

The UN expert stressed, however, that significant challenges remain in terms of human rights, including the recent violations of the peace agreement and the ceasefire by the politico-military movements, giving rise to violations of human rights.

“Terrorist attacks are rising in the north and gradually extending towards the centre and south of the country, targeting in particular Malian security forces, MINUSMA, humanitarian actors and civilian passenger transport and trade” explained Mr. Baldo, also emphasizing that international drug trafficking, transnational economic crimes and local traffic networks were fuelling the violence.

Mr. Baldo has also pointed to the rise of banditry, which is compounding the suffering of populations and hindering humanitarian work.

“The precarious security situation creates a favourable environment for the proliferation of serious violations of the most fundamental rights, particularly in areas affected by conflict,” said Mr Baldo.

While calling for the perpetrators of these attacks to be brought to justice, the UN expert concluded his statement with a call to the international community to strengthen its technical cooperation and financial support for Mali.

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

19 October - Opening a week-long conference in Vienna, Austria, on strengthening national systems in dealing with nuclear and radiological emergencies, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) told delegates today that national-level response plans in preparedness need to be in line with international safety standards and best practices.

“We provide guidance to Member States that covers all areas of emergency preparedness and response. This includes support in understanding and mastering the latest IAEA concepts, principles and safety standards.” IAEA Director General Yukio Amano said today in opening remarks opening remarks to the IAEA International Conference on Global Emergency Preparedness and Response.

“We assist in the design, conduct and evaluation of emergency exercises. We provide technical support to national and regional capacity-building projects,” he added.

In addition, the IAEA plays the central role in responding and establishing response framework to international nuclear or radiological emergency, according to the Director General.

“I encourage all countries to use the many services provided by the IAEA, including our emergency preparedness review missions,” he noted, adding: “I also encourage all countries to test their existing operational arrangements, including through international exercises such as ConvEx, to identify areas that may require further improvement.”

Mr. Amano went on to note the weaknesses of the emergency preparedness and response arrangements in 2011 Fukushima Daiichi accident, which had been highlighted in his recent report.

Acting quickly and responding properly requires extensive preparation, said Elena Buglova, Head of the IAEA Incident Emergency Centre (IEC). “Emergency response begins with preparedness,” she added. As the global focal point for coordinating international communication, assistance, and response to nuclear and radiological emergencies, the IEC helps Member States to improve their emergency preparedness and response capabilities.

Mr. Yukiya also indicated that Japan and other users of nuclear power had taken important steps to address these and other nuclear safety issues in the years following the accident.

“I have seen major improvements in safety in every nuclear power plant that I have visited since the accident. I believe the key message – that complacency about safety must be avoided at all costs – is fully understood.”

More than 470 experts in emergency preparedness and response from 85 States and 19 international organizations are gathered for the conference, which runs through Friday.

The Director-General concluded his statement emphasizing that despite the best safety efforts, the possibility of radiation-related emergencies cannot be totally excluded. “This makes an efficient emergency preparedness and response system essential.”
Guinea Bissau’s justice system has serious dysfunctions, warns UN human rights expert

19 October - While the situation of justice in Guinea-Bissau is ‘sad’ and ‘terrible,’ the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyer today noted as positive the Supreme Court ruling this year that declared unconstitutional the appointment of the nation’s prime minister.

“The authorities must prioritize urgent measures to guarantee better access to justice and to rebuild the population’s trust in the institutions,” said Mónica Pinto at the end of her first official visit to the country.

“Serious dysfunctions in the justice system and material deficiencies “create a fertile ground for independence, corruption and impunity to grow.”

Ms. Pinto exhorted the Government of Guinea-Bissau to support and dignify the work of judges and prosecutors, as well as to recognize the central role that lawyers play in the judicial system, the exercise of democracy and the strengthening of the rule of law.

Ms. Pinto will formulate recommendations in the report she will present in June 2016 before the Human Rights Council.

Summing up her observations to the West African nation, the rapporteur said “several interlocutors noted that the situation of justice is sad, terrible – in line with the country’s situation.”

Guinea-Bissau is among the 20 poorest countries of the world, and the United Nation's involvement in peace-building in Guinea-Bissau dates back to 1999. The country plunged into political turbulence earlier this year, barely a year after the re-establishment of constitutional order.

“Nonetheless,” the Special Rapporteur said “the population considered as positive the recent ruling of the Supreme Court of Justice that declared unconstitutional the appointment of a new Prime Minister in August of this year.”

“Many in Guinea-Bissau, as well as in the international community, received this decision as an assertion of the independence of the Court,” she said. “This ruling revived the credibility of the justice system.”

But Ms. Pinto said she observed multiple and grave deficiencies in the justice system.

“Justice does not reach the people; it is concentrated in the capital and a few cities in the countryside,” she said. “In the rest of the country, access to justice – a requisite necessary to exercise one’s rights – is illusory: there are no judges, no prosecutors, and no lawyers.”

The Special Rapporteur stated that the absence of courts in most parts of the country and the already mentioned high fees lead people to reach out to “traditional justice” mechanisms, which mediate between parties to solve conflicts, but without necessarily considering positive national and international law.

“For the population to regain trust in the independence of justice, it is crucial that the actors of this system be able to act efficiently,” she said.

Ms. Pinto took up her functions as UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers on 1 August 2015.
In that capacity, she works on a voluntary basis, is not UN staff and does not receive a salary for their work. He work is independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

**UN chief concerned by rising number of executions in Iran**

19 October - Expressing his “deep sadness” at the recent execution by Iran of two juvenile offenders, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today noted with concern the alarming increase in executions in the country over the last decade.

“Over 700 executions are reported to have taken place so far this year, including at least 40 public, marking the highest total recorded in the past 12 years. The majority of executions were imposed for drug-related offences – crimes that do not meet the threshold of the ‘most serious crimes’ as required by international law,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.

Last week, two juvenile offenders were executed in the country, a judgment that breeches international laws.

“The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child – both ratified by Iran – prohibits the imposition of the death penalty for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age,” said the statement.

The Secretary-General said that he was deeply saddened by the news of the two executions and added that it reflects a worrying trend in Iran.

He called on the Iranian Government to establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty and further reaffirmed the opposition of the United Nations to the imposition of the death penalty.