UN chief appeals for ‘immediate de-escalation’ as step towards political solution for Syria

20 February - The United Nations Secretary-General has appealed today to all warring parties in Syria to de-escalate the conflict in order to provide a reprieve for the country’s long-suffering civilians.

“An immediate de-escalation is a much needed step towards a political solution to the conflict,” said a statement issued by the Secretary-General’s spokesperson.

The UN chief took note of the fact that his Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura reported to the Security Council that the Syrian Government indicated it was committed to suspending all aerial attacks and artillery shelling over the entire city of Aleppo for a period of six weeks.

The Government decision was taken in order to allow the United Nations to implement a pilot project of unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid starting with one district in Aleppo and building incrementally to others.

Mr. Ban recalled Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), which called for an end to the indiscriminate use of weapons in populated areas in Syria, including shelling and aerial bombardment, and said he expects the Syrian Government to follow through on its commitment. He added an appeal to all armed opposition groups in Aleppo to suspend their shelling of the city.

In his statement Mr. Ban said that over the previous four years of war, over 200,000 civilians have died and the largest
refugee crisis of the modern era has been created. An environment has flourished in which extremist groups and terrorist organizations such as ISIL are able to flourish.

Recalling Security Council resolutions 2170 and 2178, the Secretary-General stressed that there could be no military solution to the conflict.

“This is a political conflict,” the statement said. “Ending the killing, reversing the increasing fragmentation of Syria requires a political process, based on the full implementation of the Geneva Communique of 2012, which addresses the deep roots of the conflict and meets the aspirations of all Syrians.”

UN health agency approves rapid test for Ebola as decline in cases appears to level off

20 February - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) today announced that it has approved for use a rapid diagnostic test kit for Ebola that can provide results in 15 minutes and correctly identify 92 percent of patients infected by the disease that has killed more than 9,400 people, mainly in West Africa.

Meanwhile at UN headquarters, Dr. Bruce Aylward, who leads WHO's response on Ebola, and Dr. David Nabarro, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Ebola, briefed Member States on the need to maintain the robust response to get the number of cases to zero.

“As long as there is even one case of Ebola active in the human population, it's a danger for everybody – it's a problem for West Africa, it's a problem for [wider] Africa and it's a problem for the world, Dr. Nabarro told reporters after their briefing. “We must be fully engaged, all of us, until the last person with Ebola is treated and is cured.”

The two doctors expressed their concerns about the recent slowdown in the pattern of decline in cases over the last four weeks in the three most affected countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Referring to a graph showing that the last four weeks has seen more than 120 Ebola cases a week, Dr. Aylward said “this is not what you want to see,” and described the trend as “a very bumpy road” on the way to zero cases.

They also told reporters that the upcoming rainy season starting in about two months posed as a complicating factor as it could give the virus a chance to get ahead of the response.

Earlier in Geneva, the UN health agency announced that it had “assessed and today listed the ReEBOV Antigen Rapid Test Kit [manufactured by Corgenix Medical Corp of the United States] as eligible for procurement to Ebola affected countries.”

“The test was evaluated under WHO’s Emergency Assessment and Use, a procedure established to provide minimum quality, safety and performance assurance for diagnostic products in the context of the Ebola emergency, the announcement said.

The new test, which can provide results within 15 minutes, “is able to correctly identify about 92 per cent of Ebola infected patients and 85 per cent of those not infected with the virus,” according to WHO.

In comparison, the turn-around time of current tests for Ebola can vary between 12 and 24 hours, it said.

WHO Spokesman Tarik Jašareviæ told reporters in Geneva that the new test was a little bit less accurate than the test that WHO was currently using, but it was easy to perform, it did not require electricity and it could be used in lower level health care facilities or in mobile units for patients in remote settings.
The WHO spokesman also said that a number of agencies, such as the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), have expressed interest in purchasing it.

The current Ebola outbreak in West Africa has affected more than 23,000 people with over 9,400 deaths, mostly in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

**Libya: UN condemns latest ‘cowardly’ terror attack, urges political unity**

20 February - The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has strongly deplored a string of suicide car bombings that struck the eastern city of Al-Qubbah in the latest terror attack to afflict the war-torn country.

The attack came earlier this morning in three separate waves with one bomber detonating his vehicle near a heavily frequented gas station while two others exploded their car bombs near the home of Libya’s Speaker of the House of Representatives, Aqila Saleh Kuweider, and the Government’s security headquarters. According to reports, the bombings left at least 45 dead and many others injured.

In a statement released today, UNSMIL “totally rejected” the “cowardly acts” and issued condolences to the families of the victims.

“The Mission believes that the best response to counter terrorism and violence is for the Libyans to forge ahead with the search for a political solution to end the conflict and restore stability and unity to the country and the State institutions,” the statement added.

Libyan stakeholders have been convening in a series of UN-facilitated meetings aimed at resolving the North African nation’s political crisis and bringing about military de-escalation across the country.

Nonetheless, the violence has stirred concerns within Libya and across the international community about the country’s deteriorating security situation, particularly following the arrival of militants affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and their brutal execution of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians earlier this week.

Overall, Libya’s protracted conflict has caused a serious humanitarian crisis, with at least 120,000 people forced to flee their homes, resulting in consequent shortages in both food and medical supplies along with mounting numbers of casualties.

A recent burst of violence has further rattled the war-weary nation, in conflict since the beginning of its civil war in 2011, which resulted in the ouster of late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

In the eastern city of Benghazi, an uptick in violence has seen 450 people killed since October 2014 as residents continue to face shortages in medical care. Moreover, upwards of 15,000 families – some 90,000 people – have been displaced.
UN rights experts describe ‘unconscionable’ suffering of Syrians in four-year conflict

20 February - Four United Nations human rights experts briefed the Security Council today on a new report into human rights and humanitarian law violations in Syria since the uprising in the country began, saying unthinkable crimes continue occurring daily, with victims’ voices in danger of being lost amid the horrors of the conflict.

“It is unconscionable that Syrians should continue to suffer as they have for the last four years and have to live in a world where only limited attempts have been made to return Syria to peace, and to seek justice for the victims,” said Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.

Along with Mr. Pinheiro, the Commission of Inquiry includes Karen Koning AbuZayd, Carla del Ponte and Vitit Muntarbhorn. It is mandated by the Human Rights Council to investigate and record all violations of international human rights law and is also tasked with investigating allegations of crimes against humanity and war crimes, with its mandate recently expanded to include “investigations of all massacres.”

The Commission's latest report charts the major trends and patterns of abuses perpetrated in the country from March 2011 to January 2015, stressing the need for urgent international action, particularly by States with influence over the warring parties, to find a political solution to the conflict in order to “stop grave violations of human rights and to break the intractable cycle of impunity.”

As violence in Syria has spiralled, the Commission's eight previous reports have described the heightened suffering experienced by civilians at the hands of the warring parties. Hundreds of thousands of people have died, while half the population has been displaced and men of fighting-age, women, children, humanitarian and medical workers and vulnerable groups like internally displaced persons have been targeted with violence.

The humanitarian response cannot keep pace with needs, with many people hard to reach, and the Commission says that the trends it identifies in its report suggest that the extreme hardship endured by millions of ordinary Syrians will only grow more acute unless immediate action is taken to stop the violence.

Drawing on more than 3,550 interviews with victims and eyewitnesses collected since September 2011, the Commission, which is scheduled to present its report, along with an oral update, to the Human Rights Council on 17 March, once again emphasised the importance of accountability, which it said must form part of any future negotiations if the resulting peace is to ensure.

It also urged the Security Council to work to realise the demands it set out in its Resolution 2139, with Mr. Pinheiro noting that the Resolution stressed the need to end impunity and reaffirmed the necessity of bringing perpetrators to justice.

“Victims deserve more than our compassion. We cannot continue to urge an end to the conflict, and its many crimes, without there being some prospect, some means, of bringing about that end,” he said.
Following election delay, Ban calls on Nigerian government to uphold new date for polls

20 February - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has strongly urged the Government of Nigeria to ensure that the new dates set for the country’s general elections are maintained following the vote’s recent postponement, according to the United Nations spokesperson’s office.

The polls, originally scheduled for 14 February, was pushed back to 28 March and 11 April following appeals by the armed forces to delay the vote amid ongoing fighting in the country’s north-eastern regions against the militant group, Boko Haram.

In a statement released by the UN spokesperson earlier today, the Secretary-General welcomed commitments by the candidates to the Presidency to respect the new calendar and commended the progress made by Nigeria’s Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the preparation for the elections, including the distribution of Permanent Voter Cards.

In addition, the spokesperson said Mr. Ban urged all relevant national institutions to continue to work with INEC “to ensure all voters can exercise their constitutional right to participate in the elections freely and without intimidation.”

Although the postponement was greeted in many quarters as an opportunity to channel the country’s collective focus on fighting Boko Haram, some Nigerians have reportedly voiced concern about the delay’s legality.

“The Secretary-General nevertheless expresses strong concern over reports of election-related violence,” the statement continued. “He urges all political leaders to adhere to their commitments under the Abuja Accord, to refrain from inflammatory statements and to immediately condemn any statements from their supporters that amount to an incitement to violence or subversion of the electoral process.”

The spokesperson said Mr. Ban reiterated that the UN would continue to closely follow developments in the country and that the Organization was “offering its full support to Nigeria at this important moment,” particularly through the ongoing active engagement of his High-Level Representative to Nigeria, Mohamed Ibn Chambas.

UN Somalia envoy condemns ‘cruel and indiscriminate’ Al-Shabaab attack on Mogadishu hotel

20 February - The head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), Nicholas Kay, has strongly condemned today’s attack on the Central Hotel in Mogadishu, which was claimed by Al-Shabaab.

The attack resulted in the death and injury of dozens of people, including senior members of the Somali Federal Government, said Mr. Kay, adding that many of those killed and wounded were gathered for Friday prayers.

“Such an indiscriminate attack against the Somali people is a cruel and despicable crime intended to rob Somalis of their hope for a better future,” he said. “Despite such inhuman atrocities, Somalis are successfully rebuilding their Government institutions and security forces after more than two decades of state failure and conflict.”

Mr. Kay, who is also the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, said the United Nations in Somalia remained
resolute in its support for the Somali people and would continue working to help Somalis realise their hopes and aspirations for a peaceful and stable future.

He also offered sincere condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives in the attack, and to the people and Federal Government of Somalia.

**Rights of people with disabilities cannot be ignored in development agenda, UN experts**

**20 February** - “One billion people – 15 per cent of the world’s population – are persons with disabilities, and their rights cannot be ignored,” a group of United Nations human rights experts said today, as they urged negotiators and UN Member States to include rights of such persons in the new development framework.

The call came as the second session of negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda closes this week in New York.

The 17 new post-2015 sustainable development goals (SDGs), crafted by an Open Working Group of the UN General Assembly on the issues and expected to be adopted in September 2015, will succeed replace and expand the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and will frame agendas and policies for the next 15 years.

“No one should be left behind if we want to ensure a fully inclusive society for all,” the group of three UN human rights experts said in a statement, urging international negotiators and all UN Member States to firmly include the human rights of persons with disabilities in the new development framework.

“The inclusion of persons with disabilities in the SDGs is fundamental if we are to achieve sustainable development that is genuinely rights-based,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Catalina Devandas Aguilar. “Whereas people with disabilities were invisible within the MDGs, we have seen promising advances in ensuring that the new development framework is sustainable, inclusive and accessible.”

The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, drew attention to the issue of food security.

“We know that nutrition and disability are closely linked. Both children and adults are often discriminated against, due to social stigma and negative cultural norms,” Ms. Elver said.

Worldwide, an estimated 805 million people are chronically undernourished. Since many persons with disabilities live in absolute poverty, these two large populations overlap to a considerable extent, making food security of utmost importance.

States are particularly responsible for making sure that vulnerable and marginalised people, including those with disabilities, are able to access adequate and nutritious food, she said.

“Food must be physically and economically accessible,” Ms. Elver added. “To achieve this, States must ensure that a disability perspective is taken fully into account in nutrition policy and programming, maternal and child health policy, and broader health initiatives.”

The UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Rosa Kornfeld-Matte, called on Member States to give particular attention to the situation of older persons with disabilities in the current negotiations.

“Although disability should not be associated with ageing, it is frequent in old age and thus requires resources to ensure access to different services, including education, healthcare and social protection and poverty reduction programmes,” she pointed out.
“An age-sensitive approach should be incorporated in the new development framework to enable all persons with disabilities, including older persons, to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms,” Ms. Kornfeld-Matte emphasized.

The independent experts are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Human Rights Council’s independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world.

Special Procedures’ experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work.

**In call with senior Ukrainian official, Ban expresses hope that ceasefire takes hold**

20 February - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today spoke by telephone with Ukraine’s Foreign Minister, Pavlo Klimkin, voicing his concern at the “still dangerous” situation on the ground and expressing hope that the ceasefire agreed to on 12 February in Minsk firmly takes hold across the region.

“On the possibility of a peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine, the Secretary-General informed the Foreign Minister that the United Nations would stand guided by any decision the Security Council would make on this issue,” said a note released to the press by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson this afternoon.

In his phone call with Minister Klimkin, Mr. Ban also commended the leadership of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the ongoing conflict. In addition, Mr. Ban and Mr. Klimkin agreed to continue their discussion on these matters.

Also today, at a press briefing in Geneva, the UN human rights office expressed deep worry over the fate of civilians and Ukrainian servicemen in the Debaltseve area, where heavy fighting has continued as a result of repeated breaches of the truce.

“It is unclear how many civilians were trapped while fighting raged in the town, how many have been wounded or killed, and whether they now have access to medical and other basic services,” UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) spokesperson Rupert Colville told reporters.

“We deeply regret also that OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] monitors were not, and still have not been, allowed access to this area. We are also concerned about the resumed shelling of populated areas, in the cities of Donetsk and Mariupol in particular,” he added.

Mr. Colville said that it is crucial that the ceasefire is respected and the fighting stops, especially in built-up areas, and the Minsk Agreements are fully implemented.

The death toll since the beginning of the conflict in mid-April 2014 has now risen to at least 5,692 as of Wednesday, 18 February. At least 14,122 people have also been wounded in the east of Ukraine. However, this is “conservative estimate” and the actual numbers may be considerably higher, Mr. Colville said.

“A further increase in the number of recorded casualties is expected in the coming days because reporting on casualties during the pre-ceasefire period, and especially in recent days in Debaltseve, has been considerably delayed.”

He added that the condition of captured Ukrainian pilot Nadia Savchenko, who has been detained in Moscow since July last year, is also worrying. Today is the 70th day of her hunger strike. And according to her lawyer, she decided to refuse glucose injections which were being given to her. Mr. Colville called on the Russian authorities to release her immediately.
Agriculture must change, UN agency chief tells Paris summit, urging 'paradigm shift'

20 February - The model of agricultural production that predominates today is not suitable for the new food security challenges of the 21st century and the need to be more sustainable, inclusive and resilient, the head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said today.

"Since food production is not a sufficient condition for food security, it means that the way we are producing is no longer acceptable," FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva told ministers, scientists, farmers, and members of civil society at the France-hosted International Forum on Agriculture and Climate Change held in Paris.

"What we are still mostly seeing is a model of production that cannot prevent the degradation of soils and the loss of biodiversity – both of which are essential goods, especially for future generations. This model must be reviewed. We need a paradigm shift," he added.

According to the FAO, the numbers of the chronically hungry have been reduced by 100 million over the past decade, but there are still 805 million people without enough to eat on a regular basis. Increasing production is no longer enough to end hunger. It is evident today that even though the world produces enough food to feed everyone, hunger remains a problem.

Agriculture has a large role to play in food security, building resilience to the effects of climate change and reducing humankind’s emissions of global warming gases.

"The impacts of climate change are no longer an anticipated threat. They are now a crystal-clear reality right before our eyes," the FAO chief warned in his remarks. "Climate change will not only affect food production but also the availability of food and the stability of supplies. And in a global, interdependent economy, climate change makes the global market for agricultural products less predictable and more volatile."

Mr. Graziano da Silva also underscored the important role played by healthy soils. "Soils host at least one quarter of the world’s biodiversity and are key in the carbon cycle. They help us to mitigate and adapt to climate change," he said.

2015 has been designated by the UN General Assembly as the International Year of Soils, and FAO is the lead agency for coordinating the year’s activities.

One promising new approach is what is known as “climate-smart agriculture” which means adjusting farming practices to make them more adaptive and resilient to environmental pressures, while decreasing farming’s own impacts on the environment.

FAO’s Global Alliance on Climate-Smart Agriculture – established last September by the UN General Assembly – is a broad coalition of stakeholders, including governments; farmers and food producers; scientific and educational organizations; civil society actors; international agencies and the private sector. The Alliance aims to promote increases in agricultural productivity; build greater resilience of food systems and livelihoods; and achieve reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.

The FAO Director-General also highlighted “agro-ecology” as a promising way to move food production onto a more sustainable path. The approach uses ecological theory to study and manage agricultural systems in order to make them both more productive and better at conserving natural resources.

During his visit to France, Mr. Graziano da Silva met with President François Hollande and held bilateral meetings with...
Laurent Fabius, France’s Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development and Stéphane Le Foll, the country’s Minister for Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

Tomorrow, the Director-General is slated to participate at the opening of the Paris International Agricultural Show. Today’s forum is the first in a series of events leading up the December 2015 climate summit.

At regional conference, Ban spotlights role of United States, its youth in UN’s success

20 February - The United States and its young people, in particular, are essential to the success of the United Nations, Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said today in his remarks to the UN Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA) Members Day gathering at Headquarters.

“I am asking you, particularly young people, to have a global vision. Just forget that you are American citizens. Living in New York or California…This is a very small world. [People elsewhere] are our brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers, so we have to live together,” Mr. Ban told participants at the UN 7th Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference.

The Secretary-General thanked the organization for its advocacy in helping reach young people and promote support for the UN in the US. As it stands now, the US is the largest single donor country to the UN – 20-27 per cent of all the Organization’s financial requirements come from US taxpayers.

In his remarks, Mr. Ban recalled growing up in Korea as a little boy. “Tens of thousands of American young men and women came to Korea to rescue us, as a part of the United Nations collective security. Without the US and without the United Nations, all Koreans or even the Republic of Korea might not have been able to exist…I owe a great deal – I am one of the greatest beneficiaries of the United Nations.”

Now, the UN is building refugee tents, providing food, water sanitation, and make-shift schools. And although this year marks 70 years since the UN’s creation and the end of the Second World War, there is still work to be done to fight racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other forms of intolerance.

Recalling his participation at yesterday’s White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism, Mr. Ban emphasized the importance of solidarity among people from countries of different faiths and religions. Fighting violent extremism “is not a war against any religion by any religion or against any civilization or by any civilization. This is a war against a brutal criminality - unspeakable, intolerable brutality - beheadings, kidnapping, killing, raping.”

There are reasons why this kind of extremism happens such as bad governance including failed leadership, corruption, injustice, and inequality. Addressing this is a global challenge and not a single country, however powerful or resourceful, can do it alone. The United Nations also cannot do it alone. Therefore, it’s important to show solidarity and mobilize.

Human dignity and human rights go hand-in-hand in preventing violent extremism, Mr. Ban said. “I think you should feel a responsibility as citizens of the most resourceful, richest country in the world. You should have a global citizenship.”

Mr. Ban said he plans to host a high-level meeting, inviting all the faith leaders around the world to spotlight the importance of tolerance and education. Killing people is a crime, no matter the cause or grievance.

That’s why, on the occasion of its 70th anniversary, the UN has very ambitious goals to make the world sustainable – environmentally, socially, and economically. Member States have already announced 17 very ambitious goals with 169 targets to make these goals achieved by 2030.

“By 2030, our target is that we eradicate poverty…by that time, we will have gender equality. By that time there should be no children who are left behind at school, at least secondary schools,” Mr. Ban said.
There are still 67 million young people, school-age children who are out of primary schools. By 2030, they will have to have access to secondary school. By 2030, the UN will have reduced significantly the mothers who are dying while delivering babies and girls and boys who are dying from preventable diseases such as malaria, polio and so many diseases which are preventable. By 2030, the world will be more environmentally sustainable.

The Secretary-General said he looked forward to December this year, when in Paris the world will plan to sign a historic climate change agreement. But first, in July, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Member States will meet for a conference on development financing.

**Experts urge technology boost for UN peacekeepers in ‘rapidly evolving, complex world’**

20 February - A group of United Nations experts have urged the Organization’s peacekeeping presence to incorporate technological advances into its operations in order to better confront the dynamic challenges of the 21st century, the UN’s spokesperson’s office said today.

The findings of the five-member Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation, led by peace and security expert Jane Holl Lute, include a number of practical recommendations that call on the UN Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support to keep pace with innovation and to take full advantage of readily available and existing technologies that are considered essential to success in the field.

“In a rapidly evolving and complex environment, UN peacekeeping must be ready to respond to a vast array of challenges,” Ms. Lute declared in a note to the press issued by the Office of the UN Spokesperson. “Being able to transition to a culture that values innovation is central to being able to execute more effectively on peacekeeping mandates.”

Scattered across vast countries and forbidding territories, UN peacekeeping missions frequently encounter challenges in executing their mandates. Over the past year, however, the UN has steadily ramped up its use of technology in the field in order to assist its missions with monitoring efforts.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where unwieldy terrain, dense forests and vast distances can debilitate the UN’s response time to an emergency, the introduction of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) has had an immediate impact. In one instance last year, a UAV detected a ferry accident in Lake Kivu, in the country’s east, instantly prompting the UN peacekeeping mission in the country to dispatch its speedboats and helicopters to the scene. The ‘blue helmets’ quick response led to the rescue of 15 people.

“No advantage should be withheld for those working for peace,” Ms. Lute continued. “Missions must deploy with at least the same technological advantages that most governments and enterprises around the world now find indispensable to their daily operations.”

The panel’s findings were based on several field visits and interviews with Member States, partner organizations, and partner organizations with similar field operations.

Along with the critical upgrade of field technology, UN blue helmets are also aiming to ‘go green’ through the responsible use of limited resources, in a bid to leave mission areas in better shape than when they arrived. Among other steps, GIS data is being used to help find water sources for missions so as not to compete with the local water supply.

Missions are also including waste water treatment plants designed to drastically reduce the need for water and generation of disposable waste, as well as exploring alternative sources of energy such as solar panels.
On Social Justice Day, UN spotlights human trafficking, modern slavery

20 February - The United Nations Secretary-General said today that the World Day for Social Justice comes at a pivotal moment for people and the planet, adding that this year's commemoration focuses on the scourge of human trafficking and the plight of approximately 21 million women, men and children in various forms of modern slavery.

“New instruments such as the ILO (International Labour Organization) Protocol and Recommendation on forced labour and human trafficking are helping to strengthen global efforts to punish perpetrators and end impunity,” said Ban Ki-moon in a message marking the Day. “We must continue to do more. We simply cannot achieve development for all if we leave behind those who are socially and economically exploited.”

In what he described as a crucial year for global development, he said more needed to be done to eradicate all forms of human exploitation.

With Member States working to craft a post-2015 agenda and a new set of sustainable development goals, Mr. Ban called on the international community to build a world of social justice where all people can live and work in freedom, dignity and equality.

“Around the world, there is a rising call to secure a life of dignity for all with equal rights and respect for the diverse voices of the world's peoples,” he said. “At the core of this movement lies the need for social justice.”

In a separate message on the Day, ILO Director-General, Guy Ryder, stressed: “There is no inevitability, no excuse: Forced labour can be stopped”

He pointed out that the economic gap continues to widen, with the richest 10 per cent earning 30 to 40 per cent of total income while the poorest 10 per cent earn between 2 and 7 per cent. In 2013, 939 million workers – 26.7 per cent of total employment, were still coping on $2 a day or less.

“The situation is aggravated by the widespread absence of basic social protection. Millions of people are subjected to unacceptable conditions of work and the denial of fundamental rights,” Mr. Ryder emphasized.

According to the ILO, about 21 million women, men and children are forced to work under inhuman conditions on farms, in sweatshops, on board fishing vessels, in the sex industry or in private homes. Their sweat generates $150 billion in illegal profits annually.

And women and children are particularly at risk of being abducted and sold into slavery in times of violent conflict. Forced labour can also keep entire families in abject poverty for generations.

The ILO calls for ending forced labour calls with an integrated approach. Governments, employers, trade unions and civil society, each have a role to play in protecting, defending and empowering those who are vulnerable, as well as creating opportunities for decent work for all.
UN rights office deplores racist incident in build-up to European football match

20 February - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has strongly condemned the racist behaviour exhibited by fans of the English football club, Chelsea, during the lead-up to a European match in Paris, France, and urged authorities to “re-energize” their efforts in combatting intolerance.

The incident occurred on Tuesday as the fans were en route via Paris Métro to watch the Champions League tie between Paris Saint-Germain and the London-based football team. They were filmed chanting a chorus that flaunted their racism as they prevented a French citizen of African descent from boarding the train at the Richelieu-Drouot Metro station.

“In recent years we have been engaging in discussions with both FIFA [Fédération Internationale de Football Association] and UEFA [Union of European Football Associations] about exploring ways to enhance the effort to drum racism out of football after numerous examples of racist behaviour by football fans, especially inside stadiums,” the High Commissioner’s spokesperson, Rupert Colville, told a press briefing in Geneva earlier today.

“The events in the Richelieu-Drouot Metro station in Paris show that much work remains to be done before racism is truly eradicated from sport, let alone from society at large.”

Mr. Colville acknowledged that as the filmed incident garnered attention through its extensive distribution in the media, condemnation of the fans’ behaviour had been widespread and forthcoming. As a result, he added, the UN rights agency welcomed the condemnation by politicians, media and other commentators as well as the decision by French and British authorities to launch an investigation.

Nonetheless, he continued, it remained important to recognize that the racism exhibited at the Richelieu-Drouot Metro station was not an isolated event.

A recently released UN report investigating the roots of racism in sport has, in fact, acknowledged numerous examples of European football-related incidents in which players were racially targeted with monkey calls and had bananas thrown at them, as well as the rising presence of far-right and nationalist groups in stadia across the continent.

“Similar acts of cruel and casual racism take place every single day, all across Europe, without arousing much indignation, because they are not caught on camera,” Mr. Colville said. “It is important to build on the outrage created by this snapshot of the ugly face of racism, to re-energize the effort to combat it in all its forms wherever it occurs.”