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‘Callous’ EU politics on migrants costing lives, UN rights chief warns

20 April - Following the loss of some 700 lives after a boat carrying migrants capsized and sank over the weekend, the UN human rights chief has urged European Union (EU) governments to take a “more sophisticated, more courageous and less callous approach” to coping with the flows of migrants towards Europe.

“As we learn of yet more men, women and children who have lost their lives in their search for better and safer lives abroad, I am horrified but not surprised by this latest tragedy. These deaths and the hundreds of others that preceded them in recent months were sadly predictable,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra‘ad Al Hussein said in a statement.

“The [deaths] are the result of a continuing failure of governance accompanied by a monumental failure of compassion,” he added.

“While Italy’s ‘Mare Nostrum’ programme, which ended last October, was a valiant, and in many ways successful, effort to save lives, the scaled-down ‘Operation Triton’ is simply not fit for purpose,” said Mr. Zeid, emphasizing that it is totally inadequate and "more geared to border control and policing the seas than to saving lives.”

Stopping the rescue of migrants in distress has not led to less migration, nor indeed to less smuggling, but merely to more deaths at sea, he said, stressing that Triton should immediately be replaced by a European-wide, State-led and well-resourced search and rescue capability in the Mediterranean.
“We have repeatedly underscored that no one who has food to eat, who is safe from torture, and rape, and from falling bombs, who has healthcare for his family, education for her children, decent and productive work would readily embark on these perilous journeys,” he added.

Europe is “turning its back” on some of the most vulnerable migrants in the world, and risks turning the Mediterranean into a “vast cemetery” rather than acknowledge that European economies and societies need the low-skilled labour that migrants are desperate to contribute, and that refugees have a right to seek asylum, Mr. Zeid said.

Lack of regular channels, coupled with harsh controls at external borders, has led migrants to turn to the increasingly organised smuggling industry along Europe’s southern borders, he said.

“It is time for politicians to show courageous leadership on this issue, instead of joining the mindless clamour for ever harsher deterrence policies. Not only do such policies not work, they operate at an unacceptable cost in terms of human lives,” the High Commissioner said.

In a separate statement, UN experts said that the repression of irregular migration clearly cannot be the only solution to the recurrent grave problem of masses of people drowning at sea. “The unnecessary deaths over the past few days are just the beginning. Europe must act innovatively to save lives,” said François Crépeau, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants.

“We are talking about people dying unnecessarily when States have the capacity to save lives,” he added. “If Europe is to witness a significant reduction of human suffering at borders, it must bank on regulated openness and mobility. Otherwise the number of migrants risking their lives on unseaworthy vessels over perilous sea routes can only increase.”

“Moreover, those surviving their perilous journey find themselves in a situation of social vulnerability and often fall prey to unscrupulous or criminal recruiters or employers, exploiting them in slavery-like conditions,” cautioned Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

Mr. Crépeau and Ms. Giammarinaro both said that it is important to bring to justice unscrupulous smugglers for the suffering they inflict on irregular migrants, but warned that “Europe will find it difficult to defeat resourceful and adaptable smuggling rings, unless it destroys their business model, which was created when barriers and prohibitions to mobility were erected and which thrives at evading restrictive migration policies of many EU Member States.”

The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants will present a report on his visit to Italy and a thematic report on EU border management to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2015.

Earlier in the day, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called the death of hundreds of migrants off the coast of Libya a “shock to the global conscience.” The Mediterranean is fast becoming a “sea of misery” for thousands of migrants, he said.

“And this truly titanic humanitarian tragedy highlights yet again the need to address the plight of migrants, to crack down on the criminals who exploit the most vulnerable, and to strengthen rescue capacity in the Mediterranean and elsewhere,” Mr. Ban said.
As Forum opens, deputy UN chief says 2015 a ‘critical year’ for world’s indigenous peoples

20 April - With the deadline of a post-2015 development agenda looming on the horizon, 2015 is set to be an important year for the security and prosperity of the world’s indigenous peoples, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson affirmed today in remarks delivered to the opening of the fourteenth session of the Organization’s Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

“The future well-being of the world’s indigenous peoples is a crucial part of this critical year,” the Deputy Secretary-General declared. “Now is the time for indigenous peoples to be at the forefront of a transformative agenda that leaves no one behind.”

Referring to last year’s World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, Mr. Eliasson praised the gathered delegates for having achieved a “historic milestone” in the relationship between indigenous peoples and Member States, adding that the two parties had set the direction for a strengthened partnership.

Member States, he said, had reaffirmed their support for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and agreed to a set of goals and commitments on health, education, land, and livelihoods, while also agreeing to address the participation of indigenous peoples at the UN.

This year’s Forum – which is scheduled to run for two weeks and concludes on 1 May – will similarly focus on the economic, social and cultural rights of indigenous peoples, continued Mr. Eliasson, who added that as the UN Declaration affirms the rights of indigenous peoples to health, education, clean drinking water and sanitation, it also states that such services be provided in ways that are “culturally appropriate.”

“Let us strive to ensure that the economic, social and cultural rights of indigenous peoples are fulfilled – rights that are essential to basic dignity and even to survival,” he concluded. “I count on all of you – Member States, Indigenous Peoples and other partners – to make change happen and stand up for a life of dignity for all.”

Meanwhile, addressing those gathered, General Assembly President Sam Kutesa also celebrated the “spirit of partnership and mutual respect” that had brought indigenous delegates and Member States together in tackling issues critical to the numerous indigenous communities worldwide and which had resulted in last year’s “visionary” Outcome Document.

“Experience has shown that through open engagement and dialogue, Member States and indigenous peoples can find common ground and solutions,” Mr. Kutesa declared from the podium.

“Owing to the unparalleled cooperation that took place, we have an Outcome Document that lays out firm commitments by Member States to take concrete actions on addressing the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”

With the UN system preparing its landmark post-2015 development agenda, Mr. Kutesa also acknowledged that indigenous delegates would have an added opportunity to “change our world for the better” beyond the Forum’s predetermined agenda which will include addressing issues affecting youth, including self-harm and suicide.

“Together, we must spare no effort to put in place a framework for development and international cooperation that improves the everyday lives of people worldwide, including indigenous peoples;” he continued.

“The contributions, knowledge and wisdom of indigenous peoples are of major importance as we seek to address the world’s sustainable development challenges.”
Security Council ‘deeply concerned’ about humanitarian situation for refugees in Yarmouk camp

20 April - The United Nations Security Council has today expressed deep concern about the grave humanitarian situation in Yarmouk refugee camp, located on the outskirts of the Syrian capital, Damascus.

In a press statement issued after being briefed by Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Council members welcomed recent efforts by UNRWA and Secretary-General’s Deputy Special Envoy, Ramzy Ramzy, and called for unhindered humanitarian access to Yarmouk and for the protection of civilians inside the camp.

They stressed the need to support the emergency relief effort for civilians in Yarmouk including through funding the $30 million emergency appeal and to provide diplomatic and political support for the agency.

Supporting UN efforts to assist trapped Palestinian refugees in Yarmouk, the Council highlighted a three-point plan including assistance for civilians in the camp, assisting those wanting to ‘temporarily relocate’ from the camp in accordance with international humanitarian law, and assisting residents who have already fled.

The Council called for support of the UN framework in line with legal obligations, and condemned all acts of terrorism, demanding that Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Nusra Front withdraw from Yarmouk immediately.

In addition, members called on all parties to immediately implement the relevant Security Council resolutions including Security Council resolutions 2139, 2165 and 2191, all adopted last year.

Mr. Krähenbühl, who briefed the Council from Jerusalem via video link, spoke to journalists at UN Headquarters afterwards, updating them on the briefing and on recent happenings in Yarmouk.

Having recently returned from a four-day humanitarian mission to Damascus, he said that he told the Council about the situation inside Yarmouk and his concerns about the security, safety and levels of protection of civilians in the camp.

While he acknowledged that the humanitarian situation remains “very extreme” in terms of the circumstances and hardships faced, he pointed to “concrete achievements” coming from discussions with the Government about possibly widening the scope of humanitarian access.

Many people had described the terrible impact of the situation they faced in the last two years, he said. Several thousand people remain in Yarmouk and he said he was determined to establish distribution points to allow them to access humanitarian aid, and to enhance distribution of assistance to those who had managed to escape to nearby neighbourhoods.

Describing some of the assistance that UNRWA was distributing, he underscored the need for ongoing financial assistance. A total of $30 million was needed for immediate emergency aid in addition to over $400 million requested for the overall Syria Appeal, which had received only 19 per cent funding.

Mr. Krähenbühl stressed that the Council should remain seized of the matter and said a visit by members to Syria would be a strong signal of the importance that it attaches to the situation.
UN condemns ‘horrific’ attack that killed four UNICEF staff in Somalia

20 April - The United Nations has strongly condemned this morning’s attack on a UN vehicle in north-eastern Somalia, which killed four UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) workers and seriously injured four others when a roadside bomb exploded alongside the minibus in which they were riding.

“All of us at UNICEF are deeply saddened, and deeply angered,” Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive-Director, said in a statement to the press.

At about 8:00 this morning, a suspected IED (improvised explosive device) targeted a UN vehicle in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia. A UNICEF statement said that the IED attack occurred when the staffs were travelling from their guest house to the office, normally a three-minute drive. Emergency response operations are ongoing.

“The horrific attack on our UNICEF colleagues today in northern Somalia is an assault not only on them but on the people they served. Our immediate thoughts are with the families of the four staff members who were killed and with those who were injured,” Mr. Lake added.

“Our colleagues dedicated their lives to working for the children of Somalia. They are not victims. They and those who were wounded are heroes. We mourn their loss and hope for the full recovery of the injured,” he said.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon similarly voiced his outrage at the attack which, he said, would “not erode the commitment of the whole United Nations family to supporting the people and Government of Somalia in rebuilding peace and prosperity in their country.”

In addition, Mr. Ban condemned in the “strongest terms” the attack against UN staff who were “working to provide humanitarian and development assistance to the people of Somalia, including the country’s children, many of whom are in desperate need.”

“Such barbaric attacks will not diminish the United Nations’ resolve to continue working for the cause of peace in the country.”

At the same time, the UN Security Council also deplored the “appalling” attack for which it blamed the Islamist extremist group Al Shabaab.

The members reaffirmed the Council’s stance condemning terrorism “in all its forms and manifestations” as one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and branding all terrorist acts as “criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivation.”

“This is truly a terrible, terrible day for UNICEF, and indeed for all those for whom these colleagues were working in the country,” said Edward Carwardine, Deputy Director of Communications at UNICEF in an interview with UN Radio.

He said that UNICEF has been in Somalia since 1972 and its programmes are now focused particularly on areas such as water, education, child health nutrition and the protection of children. The agency, he said “is working for some of the most vulnerable children and families in that part of the country.”

And despite today’s tragedy, Mr. Carwardine said, “UNICEF’s ongoing work for these most vulnerable children is our priority and we are committed to continuing that as best we can.”
Earlier this morning, the UN Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) also condemned the attack calling it a “complete disregard for the lives of people working on the humanitarian and development needs of the people of Somalia is despicable.”

“I am shocked and horrified by what took place today in Garowe,” Nicholas Kay, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Somalia and head of the UN mission (UNSOM) there said in a statement.

“Our UN colleagues are saddened but unified in the face of this tragedy. The United Nations remains determined to stand by the people of Somalia. My deepest sympathies and thoughts are with the friends and families of all those who lost their lives, and those injured and affected,” Mr. Kay said.

UN chief deplores ‘barbaric’ killing of Ethiopian nationals in Libya

20 April - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned in the strongest terms the killing of a number of Ethiopian nationals in Libya by extremists affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), according to a United Nations spokesperson.

In a statement released earlier today, Mr. Ban said he “utterly deplores” the targeting of people on the basis of their religious affiliation and expressed his condolences to the families of those who lost their lives as a result of the attack.

The Secretary-General reaffirmed that the UN-backed political talks remained “the best chance” for Libyans to overcome their country’s crisis and encourage the parties to make all the necessary compromises to reach an agreement.

“Only by working together will Libyans be able to start building a state and institutions that can confront terrorism,” concluded the statement from Mr. Ban’s spokesperson.

ISIL, which is also known by its Arabic designation, Da’esh, has been operative in Libya over the past few months amid intensifying UN-backed efforts to facilitate a political resolution to the country’s ongoing crisis. In late February, for example, the militant group claimed responsibility for a series of attacks killed at least 45 people and injured scores of others in the city of al-Qubbah.

Renewed global development partnership vital to post-2015 agenda, Ban tells top finance institutions

20 April - Kicking off a high-level meeting with global financial institutions and development agencies at United Nations Headquarters this morning, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on governments, the business sector and civil society to work closely together to push forward the post-2015 development agenda.

“Too much is at stake,” Ban Ki-moon said, stressing the need to identify and tackle the root causes of the biggest challenges to economic growth, including heightened geopolitical tension, high youth unemployment and the employment gender gap.

“Strong engagement from all sectors here today illustrates the unprecedented cooperation that is critical to forging ahead on a sustainable development agenda,” Mr. Ban said in his opening remarks.

The annual high-level meeting – organized by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) included representatives from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Today's keynote address was delivered by Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, Ali Babacan. Several finance ministers,
business leaders and civil society representatives are also present for today's and tomorrow's discussion.

“The post-2015 development agenda is ambitious. The financing needs are enormous. They can be met if we work together but we will not succeed unless we forge a partnership and learn the lessons of the current global economy,” the UN chief said today.

“The global economy recovery continues to be sluggish,” Mr. Ban continued. “We must ensure the availability of the required resources at all levels, national international public and private.”

Today's morning session focused on coherence, coordination and cooperation in the context of financing for sustainable development for the post-2015 development agenda. The afternoon thematic debate will address current challenges and emerging opportunities for the mobilization of financial resources.

This meeting comes ahead of July's Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The conference will include Heads of State and ministers and will aim to result both in a negotiated and agreed outcome and in summaries of the plenary meetings and other deliberations of the Conference.

Mr. Ban today said that the Addis Ababa gathering will be an opportunity to devise a politically inclusive development agenda. The outcome must provide three things: first, cohesive and holistic framework for sustainable development; second, concrete deliverables in critical areas and finally, a strong follow-up process to ensure that “no country is left behind,” Mr. Ban continued.

“Only a concerted effort by all stakeholders will allow us to succeed. We must work closely together to make this year a year of global action,” he stressed.

Delivering today’s opening remarks alongside Mr. Ban was President of the Economic and Social Council, Martin Sajdik, who said the meeting comes at a crucial time in history.

“We all have been working closely together this year in order to chart a new era of sustainable development. We have to do our utmost to extend the unprecedented agenda. And it must be with the effort of national, regional and international development,” Mr. Sajdik said.

Mr. Sajdik said that negotiations of the financing framework have made the international community aware of the wide-range of issues it needs to tackle. Better coordination between public and private investment will maximize its developmental impact.

Past regional and global financial crises have shown that decades of progress can be undone very quickly, he warned. “Indeed, a strong fertile economy would be great ground for the post-2015 agenda,” but crises in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq and Yemen have caused humanitarian challenges of unprecedented proportions and devastated national economies.

“The appalling magnitude of unsolved economic and political challenges must not be ignored,” Mr. Sajdik urged. “In order to mitigate these challenges we must strengthen economic cooperation, create productive jobs, maintain financial stability.”

The ECOSOC President also underscored the need to stand up against organized crime and human trafficking. “We all know too well that good governance and rule of law are basic requirements to establish and guard these full societies,” he emphasised.

Putting our planet on the right path lies with governments, however, only a joint effort leveraging the strength of governments, businesses, and civil society - based on equity, cooperation and accountability - can affect transformative change.

“Now more than ever, we must work as one and deliver for all,” he said.
Vanuatu: UNICEF launches birth registration campaign as recovery from Cyclone Pam continues

20 April - Thousands of children affected by the devastation of last month’s Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu are slated to receive new birth certificates through a United Nations-supported campaign, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) announced today.

“Birth registration is an official recording of a child as a citizen by a Government. It is both a right and an important process for child protection,” UNICEF Pacific Representative Dr. Karen Allen said in a press release.

“Without a birth certificate, children, especially the most vulnerable, may one day find it difficult to access essential health and social services, and will find it difficult later on in life to apply for a job, get a passport, vote or open a bank account.”

The campaign, which kicks-off today and will target 7000 children on 15 islands in six provinces, will promote birth registration for children whose births have not been registered and re-issue certificates for those children whose documents were destroyed when Cyclone Pam struck Vanuatu in March.

On 13 March, Tropical Cyclone Pam swept through the archipelago, wiping out homes and infrastructure, destroying the electricity network and razing crops in the mainly agricultural country. So far, aid has reached all 22 storm-affected islands of the country, despite significant logistical challenges due to the geographic spread of the archipelago.

The United Nations and its partners have started to provide families with seed kits to ensure long-term food security, and will support the government in restoring community infrastructure and reviving economic activities.

UNICEF Representative Karen Allen explained that the agency was working with the Government and local authorities to ensure that children across Vanuatu have their births registered and to also ensure that children at a disadvantage are included in national-level planning and decisions.

“If children are not officially registered as citizens, they will be vulnerable to exclusion, including remaining uncounted in planning and budgeting,” Dr. Allen continued, adding that the campaign may be the first time in which re-issue of lost birth certificates is part of post-disaster early recovery in the Pacific.”

“This has lasting consequences not only for their wellbeing but also for the development of their communities and countries.”

Ahead of World Malaria Day, UN officials urge continued investment in fight against the disease

20 April - Although more investment and stronger coordination have helped the international community make significant inroads in the global fight against malaria, continued investment for malaria control and elimination targets remains essential for a post-2015 future, top United Nations officials declared today.

At an event held at UN Headquarters in New York today and bringing together senior Organization officials, diplomatic leaders and development experts, the United Nations-supported Roll Back Malaria Partnership confirmed that 64 out of 97 countries are now on track to meet the malaria-specific Millennium Development Goal (MDG) aimed at reversing malaria incidence by 2015.
“Together, we have already made huge strides in our efforts to combat this preventable and treatable disease,” Sam Kutesa, President of the UN General Assembly, told those gathered.

“Nevertheless, there is still more work to be done to achieve a world free of malaria,” he continued. “To reach our goals, we must have continued investments and sustained political commitments for malaria control and elimination.”

According to the latest report by the World Health Organization (WHO), malaria mortality rates have decreased by 47 per cent worldwide and 54 per cent in Africa alone since 2000. Since 2001, it is estimated that more than 4 million malaria-related deaths have been averted, approximately 97 per cent of which have been children under five.

The event – which comes ahead of this year’s commemoration of World Malaria Day, marked on 25 April – also spotlighted the $100 billion price tag required to eliminate the mosquito-borne disease by 2030.

To that point, the Roll Back Malaria Partnership noted that despite its high cost, the investment nevertheless carried “a significant return”: a potential 12 million lives saved, nearly 3 billion cases averted globally and a global gain of $270 billion if the disease is eradicated in sub-Saharan Africa alone.

“A new generation now has the chance to grow up and contribute to their societies thanks to the work carried out by the malaria community,” Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations said in his remarks to the event.

“Fighting malaria is indeed one of the most cost-effective public health investments of our time. We cannot afford to stop investing now.”

**UN Member States, faith leaders set for talks in New York on tolerance and fostering peace**

20 April - The United Nations is set to host at its New York Headquarters a meeting bringing together the Organization’s Member States with faith leaders to discuss ways to promote tolerance and reconciliation, as well as to address the challenges of countering radicalization and extremism.

President of the UN General Assembly, Sam Kutesa will convene in conjunction with the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the High-Representative for the UN Alliance of Civilizations, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, a High-Level Thematic Debate on Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation, Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism.

The two-day High-Level meeting will offer a platform for Member States and faith leaders from around the world, along with other stakeholders, to discuss means of promoting tolerance and reconciliation, as well as to address challenges of countering radicalization and extremism.

Day one of the meeting will consist of an opening session, a high-level plenary and an interactive panel discussion. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss practical strategies to foster peaceful, inclusive societies and to counter the threat of radicalization and violent extremism.

Day two will be centred on interfaith dialogue, featuring high-level statements and an interactive panel discussion on the role of faith leaders in promoting tolerance for diversity, freedom of expression and human rights.

Religious communities have followers across race, class, and gender. This meeting will be a powerful demonstration of how diverse communities can address common challenges.

The outcome of the meeting will be a President’s summary highlighting salient points and key messages arising from the thematic debate.
Staff members from across the UN system and representatives of Member States will be able to follow the proceedings of this exceptional High-Level event online.

**Ban urges ‘bold changes’ to aid action as States prepare for World Humanitarian Summit**

**20 April** - Looking ahead to the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul next year, the United Nations Secretary-General today stressed how news stories were serving to compel the international community into agreeing to align major global commitments to support the world’s most vulnerable people.

“Today’s headlines have brought new reminders of why the Summit is needed,” said Ban Ki-moon as he briefed UN Member States on the Summit, set to be held next May. “The death of hundreds of migrants off the coast of Libya is not only deeply saddening – it should shock the global conscience.”

Noting that more migrants had died in 2015 so far than died on the **Titanic**, he drew attention also to the attack today on UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) workers in Somalia, which he said showed the great peril that humanitarian and development workers face around the world.

Stressing the need for solidarity with and heightened support for migrants fleeing war and persecution, he added a call to ensure that humanitarian personnel have the security they need to carry out their vital work.

He said the World Humanitarian Summit would be a key element of the new global agenda for change and action, alongside the September special summit on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and the December climate change conference in Paris.

“We look to the World Humanitarian Summit to generate strong global support for bold changes in humanitarian action,” he said. “This is the only way we will meet the enormous challenges we face in the coming years and decades. The world is changing, and we need to make sure we change with it to meet the needs of those affected by crisis in a timely and effective manner.”

Stressing the huge input of humanitarian action to saving lives worldwide every day, he also acknowledged the huge challenges such action faced, including urbanization, population growth, environmental degradation, conflict, climate change and resource scarcity, which were particularly powerful in areas of underdevelopment, poverty and inequality, leaving people more and more vulnerable.

“The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance around the world has doubled in just ten years,” Mr. Ban noted. “More people are displaced by conflict than at any time since 1945. That figure stands at over 51 million. People displaced within their countries because of conflict are now displaced for an average of 17 years. Millions of children are out of school, sometimes for years. And the situation is getting worse.”

He said that a billion people could be displaced because of climate change by 2050, with more than 40 per cent of the global population living in areas of severe water stress. Additionally, economic losses from natural disasters were likely to increase dramatically from the $300 billion currently lost annually.

“Our challenge is clear: we must act now to strengthen our efforts,” he said. “The World Humanitarian Summit, and the consultations leading up to it, aim to build a more inclusive, diverse and truly global humanitarian system.”

He said regional consultations were providing the building blocks for the changes that must be made at the global, regional and national levels to reaffirm the principles that guide humanitarian work. The Summit would need to focus the world’s attention on people caught in crisis, especially those that may have receded from the spotlight but where suffering remains acute.
“We have the skills, resources, tools and technology,” he said. “Together, we can create a world where human suffering from crises is vastly reduced.”

**UN official stresses link between healthy soils, sustainable development as Global Soil Week starts**

20 April - As Global Soil Week began in Berlin today, a United Nations agricultural agency official used his opening address to stress the significance of healthy soils to global food production and the importance of prioritizing soil health in public policy.

“If humanity’s overarching need for food security and nutrition, climate change mitigation and sustainable development is to be met, soil resources have to be given the global attention they deserve,” said Moujahed Achouri, Director of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Land and Water Division.

“Soils are essential for achieving food security and nutrition and have the potential to help mitigate the negative impacts of climate change.”

In addition to sustaining 95 per cent of food production, soils host more than a quarter of the planet’s biodiversity, are a major source of pharmaceuticals, and play a critical role in the carbon cycle, Mr. Achouri added.

He also pointed to an “alarming” level of soil degradation – estimated at 33 percent globally – saying the added pressures put on soils are reaching critical limits, with the potential to threaten food security and send many people into poverty.

Global Soil Week, which started in Berlin yesterday, brings together more than 550 participants from 78 countries working on sustainable soil management and land governance, and the FAO used the opportunity to call on the international soil community and policy makers to work together to reduce soil degradation and restore already degraded land because of the contribution that sustainable soil management can make to production of more and healthier food.

Global Soil Week 2015 coincides with the International Year of Soils, which aims to raise awareness about often-unrecognized benefits of soils to human health and sustainable development, and this year, the Week’s focus is on the need for including soil issues in the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) that are currently being discussed.

**UN humanitarian agencies mobilize assistance amid renewed fighting in Iraq**

19 April - The United Nations’ humanitarian agencies are rushing support to thousands of Iraqis fleeing a flare-up in hostilities throughout the country’s Anbar Governate, the Organization confirmed today.

In a press release issued earlier this morning, the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) noted that more than 90,000 people were fleeing the city of Ramadi and surrounding areas and were moving, on foot, towards Khaldiya, Ameriya al Faullujah and Baghdad.

“Our top priority is delivering life-saving assistance to people who are fleeing – food, water and shelter – are highest on the list of priorities,” explained Lise Grande, the Humanitarian Coordinator for the United Nations in Iraq.

“Seeing people carrying what little they can and rushing for safety is heart-breaking,” Ms. Grande continued. “We are very worried about people’s safety; the situation is dramatic and only urgent action can save lives.”

According to OCHA, the UN’s humanitarian agencies have moved “quickly” to provide assistance for those in need.
The World Food Programme (WFP) has begun distributing immediate response rations, or IRRs, sufficient for three days to over 41,000 people in Ramadi and over 8,000 newly displaced in Baghdad.

Meanwhile, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) has distributed core relief item kits to approximately 1,000 families in Ameriya al Faullujah and Baghdad and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is similarly distributing rapid response mechanism kits to cover the immediate needs of 85,000 people.

For its part, the World Health Organization (WHO) is assisting Iraq’s Ministry of Health with front-line services.

Amid ongoing fighting between Iraqi Government forces and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and continuing sectarian tensions across society, the Middle Eastern country is facing a period of immense peace and security challenges.

OCHA reported that at least 2.7 million Iraqis have been displaced since January 2014, including 400,000 from Anbar Governate alone, making the Iraq crisis one of the most complex humanitarian emergencies in the world today.

Funding shortfalls, however, have added to the complexity of the humanitarian response. The UN has observed that in the next few months 60 per cent of programmes supported by the Organization's humanitarian partners are slated to be curtailed or shut-down unless funding is received.

“We are doing what we can to help but the humanitarian operation in Iraq is severely underfunded,” Ms. Grande warned.

“We’re asking everyone who can, to help contribute financially to the operation.”

'Make global goals a global reality': UN chief urges climate action at Earth Day concert

19 April - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has declared 2015 a year for global action on climate, gender and development issues, warning revellers attending the 2015 edition of the Global Citizen Earth Day concert that there is “no Plan B because there is no Planet B.”

Addressing an electrified crowd gathered on Washington, D.C.’s National Mall for last night’s performances which reportedly featured top-billing acts such as Will.i.am, Usher, No Doubt, and Mary J. Blige, the Secretary-General urged concert goers to speak up and raise their voices to make a difference.

“I want to hear from you. It's our last chance to slow global warming,” cautioned Mr. Ban.

“Will you support our global goal to empower women and girls? Will you speak up to get every child in school? Will you raise your voice for people and our planet?”

The Secretary-General’s appeal comes as the United Nations gears up to launch its post-2015 development agenda while also rolling out a series of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at reducing poverty, ensuring gender equality and halting and reversing the effects of climate change.

From the stage on the National Mall yesterday evening, Mr. Ban told the audience that 2015 offered the international community its best chance to end global poverty and that this year was a crucial one for global action.

“You have the power. Your generation can make it happen,” he continued. “Be a global citizen. Take your passion and compassion and build a better, sustainable world and, together, let’s make our global goals a global reality.”
DOHA: UN conference ends with call for concrete action on crime prevention and criminal justice

19 April - As the 13th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice ground down to a close today in Doha, Qatar, the head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) called on Member States to implement the Doha Declaration and take definitive action on comprehensive crime prevention and criminal justice policies and strategies.

“The challenge we all face now is turning this declaration into action,” said UNODC Executive Director, Yury Fedotov, in his remarks at the closing session of the UN Crime Congress. “I am encouraged by the determination of our hosts to make Doha the point of departure and look forward to working with them, and other partners, on translating the inspirational words of the declaration into concrete, tangible results.”

The ‘Doha Declaration,’ a political document unanimously adopted by delegates at the opening of the Congress on Sunday 12 April, puts an emphasis on important aspects of fighting transnational organized crime and strengthening criminal justice systems and crime prevention.

In addition, it contains recommendations which will be submitted to the next session of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, to be held in Vienna from 18 to 22 May.

In his remarks, Mr. Fedotov hailed the declaration as an “empowering political statement” which, he said, recognizes the importance of strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice systems around the world.

“It is founded on fairness, justice and humanity, and driven by the need to be accessible and responsive to the rights of all individuals” he continued, adding that the document “stresses the commitment and political will of Member States on implementing comprehensive crime prevention and criminal justice policies and strategies, which promote the rule of law at the national and international levels.”

Turning to today’s migrant tragedy in the Mediterranean Sea in which some 700 lives are feared lost, Mr. Fedotov said there can be no better example of what the Crime Congress stands for than mobilizing to implement the Doha Declaration “on behalf of the victims of crime, including migrants, and that we track down the smugglers who feed off desperation.”

As a result, he called on all countries, inter-governmental organizations and civil society to work together in a spirit of cooperation “to end these senseless deaths.”

By adhering to the 13-page Declaration, Doha participants committed themselves to holistic and comprehensive approaches to countering all forms of crime, violence, corruption and terrorism.

They further committed themselves to a number of specific actions, including the adoption of comprehensive and inclusive national crime prevention and criminal justice policies and programs; ensuring the right of everyone to a fair trial without undue delay; reviewing and reforming legal aid policies; mainstreaming a gender perspective and youth-related concerns into criminal justice efforts; and countering corruption and enhancing transparency in public administration.
UN urges ‘robust’ rescue operations for refugees following largest migrant catastrophe in Mediterranean

19 April - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has expressed shock and deep sadness at the news of the latest boat capsizing in the Mediterranean Sea in which hundreds of people are feared lost, adding that such a catastrophic event provides yet another indication of the need for a “robust” rescue-at-sea mechanism aimed at preventing future tragedies.

In a statement released by his spokesperson’s office yesterday evening, Mr. Ban said the tragedy was just the latest in a line of migrant-related incidents in which hundreds of people are reported to have died.

According to initial accounts, the boat overturned shortly before midnight on 18 April in Libyan waters and some 180 kilometres south of the Italian island of Lampedusa.

Italian and Maltese naval vessels and merchant ships are reportedly in the area and currently involved in the ongoing rescue operation. Nonetheless, only around 50 of the 700 migrants reported to be aboard the capsized boat have so far been rescued.

The incident will be the largest loss of life from any incident involving refugees and migrants on the Mediterranean Sea and comes just days after a similar maritime tragedy took another 400 lives.

“With record numbers fleeing war and persecution, more people are trying to reach Europe by boat and more lives are being lost,” the Secretary-General’s statement continued. “This makes the Mediterranean the world’s deadliest route used by asylum seekers and migrants.”

Mr. Ban called on the international community to institute a “comprehensive and collective” response which, he added, extended beyond the more immediate needs of improved rescue-at-sea options and access to protection.

“It is to ensure the right to asylum of the growing number of people worldwide fleeing war who need refuge and safe haven,” he explained. “Their journeys are fraught with risks including discrimination, violence and exploitation and they urgently need our protection during their hour of greatest need.”

At the same time, in a separate message, the head of the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) also expressed shock at the news of the latest boat capsizing in the Mediterranean Sea.

“This disaster confirms how urgent it is to restore a robust rescue-at-sea operation and establish credible legal avenues to reach Europe,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres confirmed in a press release. “Otherwise people seeking safety will continue to perish at sea.”

The UN refugee agency has long been advocating for a comprehensive and urgent response from the European Union and shared specific proposals including the establishment of a possible scheme to compensate shipping companies involved in rescuing people at sea, increasing credible legal alternatives to dangerous voyages and a pilot relocation programme for Syrians refugees arriving in Italy and Greece.

Mr. Guterres also noted that the tragedy pointed to the need for a comprehensive European approach to address the root causes that drive so many people to such a tragic end.

“I hope the EU will rise to the occasion, fully assuming a decisive role to prevent future such tragedies,” he added.
2015 has already seen some 31,500 people make crossings to Italy and Greece – the first and second largest countries of arrival respectively. UNHCR has reported that numbers have also been recently picking up as weather conditions in the Mediterranean improve.

If the latest death toll is confirmed, some 1600 people would have died already this year attempting to cross the Mediterranean into Europe.

**UN envoy condemns outbreak of violence in Libyan capital amid ongoing political talks**

**18 April** - The head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Bernardino León has strongly condemned the renewed outbreak of violence in the Libyan capital of Tripoli amid ongoing political dialogue aimed at resolving the crisis in the country.

According to a press release issued by UNSMIL this afternoon, the outburst of violence in the Tripoli neighbourhood of Fashloum has already caused “many casualties and endangered the lives of civilians” with initial reports suggesting that three civilians were killed, including a young girl, since the resumption of hostilities.

There have also been reports of abductions of civilians and burning of houses in the context of the fighting, UNSMIL added.

In the press release, Mr. León stressed that there could be “no justification whatsoever for the clashes taking place in Tripoli, nor for the continuing armed hostilities taking place in different parts of the country,” particularly at a time when national stakeholders were gathered to reach a mediated settlement.

The latest round of political talks, in fact, are currently underway in Skhirat, Morocco with parties expected to present their remarks regarding the overall framework outlined in the Draft Agreement on the Political Transition in Libya.

The UN official renewed his call on all Libyan parties “to exert all possible efforts to bring an immediate end to the fighting in Tripoli and elsewhere, and to undertake all necessary measures to create a more conducive environment for the ongoing dialogue talks.”

In addition, Mr. León urged those fighting to ensure that civilians and civilian objects were not targets of violence and called for all abducted civilians to be released immediately.
In Washington, UN chief urges finance leaders to ‘plant seeds’ of post-2015 agenda

18 April - Financing will be key for the creation and unveiling of an ambitious post-2015 development agenda, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared today, as he stressed that 2015 marked a time of global action for people and the planet.

“Our aim is to eradicate poverty and create shared prosperity, the Secretary-General told the International Monetary Fund’s International Monetary and Finance Committee during his ongoing trip to Washington, D.C.

“Done wisely, this transformation will not come at the cost of economic growth,” Mr. Ban continued. “Indeed, it can be a catalyst for growth that is cleaner, more sustainable and more equitable. As leaders of public finance, you can help plant the seeds of this transformation.”

The post-2015 development agenda would be characterized by two events in particular, the UN chief said, as he pointed to the three-day UN Special Summit scheduled for September in New York and the climate negotiations to be held in Paris in December.

For both events, he observed, financing would be “key” and an ambitious and comprehensive global climate financing framework remained a necessity in order “to stimulate investment, boost inclusive, low-carbon growth and create decent jobs.”

“We need a credible trajectory for realizing the $100 billion goal per year by 2020, as well as the operationalization of the Green Climate Fund. This was a commitment which was made in 2009 during the Copenhagen climate change summit meeting,” Mr. Ban explained. “We have only mobilized $10 billion as an initial capitalization of this Green Climate Fund. I would really hope that there will be a trajectory, a path, which will be shown to the Member States.”

The Secretary-General acknowledged that the public and private sectors would need to join together in order to create incentives and regulatory frameworks that would encourage long-term sustainable growth and development. In addition, he said, a conducive international enabling environment would also be “critical” which, in turn, required addressing issues of global economic governance and ensuring that “all our international institutions are fit for purpose.”

“Creating a holistic approach to financing for sustainable development can only be accomplished with your active support,” Mr. Ban added.

“Let us work together in this pivotal year for global action to truly build a safer and more sustainable world for all.”

Meanwhile, in separate remarks delivered to the IMF’s Development Committee, the Secretary-General reiterated the importance of the IMF, World Bank Group and Regional Development Banks in helping the UN roll-out the post-2015 development agenda.

“It is essential to strengthen cooperation within the multilateral system to forge a comprehensive package on the means of implementation,” he declared. “That means we also need a paradigm shift in financing sustainable development.”

Mr. Ban outlined what he described as “six guideposts” which he said would help usher the international community to its desired goals including domestic resource mobilization; tapping both public and private funds; developing new instruments and policies to increase non-concessional finance and more effectively blend concessional and non-concessional support to the public sector; mobilizing climate finance; boosting the quality of private finance; and innovating and transferring appropriate technologies as a non-financial means of implementation.
Afghanistan: UN condemns ‘brutal’ suicide attack in Jalalabad

18 April - United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonović, has strongly condemned the “brutal” suicide attack that reportedly killed at least 35 people and injured more than 100 others in the Afghan city of Jalalabad earlier today.

According to media reports, the suicide attack targeted people queuing outside a bank in the centre of the city, including Government employees and security forces personnel collecting their salaries. Among those killed and injured were children and the attack was subsequently followed by at least two other bombings later in the day.

In a news release issued by the UN Office of the High-Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), Mr. Šimonović, who is currently visiting the eastern Afghan city, said that following the attack he immediately met the Acting Governor, local police chief and military commander to express the UN’s “deep condolences” and condemn the indiscriminate tactics used in such attacks that were “exacting such an unacceptable toll on Afghan civilians.”

In the first three months of 2015, in fact, total civilian deaths and injuries followed the record high levels of 2014, according to the latest figures released the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Between 1 January and 31 March, UNAMA documented 655 deaths and 1,155 injuries with casualties caused by suicide attacks remaining on par with 2014 levels.

“The use of suicide bombs and other devices in such an indiscriminate way by insurgent groups clearly constitutes a war crime,” Mr. Šimonović continued.

“Those responsible for organizing or perpetrating such attacks must be brought to justice.”

At the same time, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also condemned in the strongest terms the “barbaric attack.”

In a statement issued by his spokesperson's office, Mr. Ban called for those responsible to be “swiftly brought to justice” while urging all Afghans “to remain united in rejecting terrorism and violent extremism.”

DOHA: At UN conference, UN agencies urge Member States to act on new standards for eliminating violence against children

18 April - United Nations officials gathered at the UN Crime Congress under way in Doha, Qatar, have called on Member States to take action and implement the new international standards on the elimination of violence against children adopted late last year, stressing that such violence continues to have a devastating effect on children, families, and society as a whole.

The new set of international standards and norms – entitled the “United Nations Model strategies and practical measures on the elimination of violence against children in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice,” and approved by the UN General Assembly on 18 December 2014 – aim to not only improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in preventing and responding to violence against children but also to protect children against any violence that may result from their contact with that system.

Speaking at a high-level event on the margins of the Crime Congress earlier this week, Valerie Lebaux, the Chief of the Justice Section, Division for Operations, in the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said such Model strategies represent “an historical achievement and a strong endorsement of the commitment of Member States towards
addressing the issue of violence against children.

As part of its mandate, in fact, UNODC has now developed a joint global programme with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to tackle head-on the scourge of violence against children.

“Considering the complex nature of the issue, the needs for technical assistance are extensive and cannot be met within a short period of time,” Ms. Lebaux continued. “Our joint efforts are essential to translate the Model Strategies into concrete actions.”

In addition, she stressed that interventions require the effective incorporation of international standards and norms into national legislation, the establishment of accountable institutions and policies, the training of justice practitioners, and the cooperation between child protection and justice systems.

Also addressing the high-level event, Mona Rishmawi, Chief of the Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch at the Office of the High-Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), drew attention to the numerous children lost in the world's prison systems, adding that a justice policy that places “emphasis on incarceration and criminal sanction, in particular as a primary response to child offenders is simply the wrong response.”

“Children do not belong to prisons. Children should not be kept in closed institutions deprived of care, love and nurture. They belong in schools, in playgrounds and safe home environments,” Ms. Rishmawi declared.

“We know that wherever children are deprived of liberty they are at especially high-risk of physical violence and abuse whether by the police, other detainees or their own peers,” she continued, adding that children deprived of their liberty had a higher rate of anxiety, depression and feelings of helplessness.

“That's why we welcome these Model Strategies and that's why they are needed,” she concluded.

UN envoy on Middle East peace welcomes release of Palestinian tax revenues

18 April - The United Nations official charged with coordinating the Middle East peace process has welcomed the announcement that an agreement has been reached on the release of Palestinian tax revenues by Israeli authorities – a move in line with the Paris Protocol.

“Withholding these revenues for over four months has undermined the stability of the Palestinian institutions and the ability of Prime Minister Hamdallah's government to pay public sector salaries and provide needed services,” said Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, in a statement issued earlier today.

According to a recent Security Council briefing by Mr. Mladenov's predecessor, Robert Serry, as of 26 March the amount of withheld revenues added up to over $400 million dollars, deepening the Palestinian Authority's financial crisis.

“The agreement is an important step in the right direction for both sides,” Mr. Mladenov added in his statement.

Mr. Mladenov, whose mandate includes representing the Secretary-General and leading the UN system in all political and diplomatic efforts related to the peace process, also coordinates the humanitarian and development work of UN agencies and programmes in the occupied Palestinian territory, in support of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people.