In the headlines:

- ‘We must turn back from this dangerous abyss,’ Ban says in Israel on first day of visit to crisis-torn region
- Central African Republic: Security Council condemns violence, reiterates decision to apply sanctions
- UN refugee agency provides shelter to Iraqis uprooted in restive Anbar province
- Women worldwide live longer, healthier lives with better education, says new UN report
- At Security Council, heads of main UN bodies highlight ‘mutually reinforcing’ areas of concern
- Greece’s overstretched reception centres may imperil EU-wide plan as arrivals hit half million mark – UN
- Recent floods deal devastating blow to agricultural livelihoods and food security in Myanmar – UN
- With winter closing in, UN relief wing races against time to reach isolated areas of Nepal
- ‘Actions by States are increasingly transnational,’ UN expert warns, stressing absolute prohibition against torture
- UN rights experts call for release of Qatari poet jailed for writing and reciting poem
- On World Statistics Day, UN flags importance of reliable data to achieve new development agenda
- UN agency reaches Donetsk after months of restricted humanitarian access

'We must turn back from this dangerous abyss,’ Ban says in Israel on first day of visit to crisis-torn region

20 October - In an effort to ease the current tensions between Israel and Palestine, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is heading to the region to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Abbas, as well as with other senior officials. The UN chief arrived earlier today in Jerusalem and began by meeting with the President of Israel, Reuben Rivlin.

A statement issued earlier today by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson stressed that he “has repeatedly expressed his anguish and deep concern at the escalating violence in Israel and Palestine.”

A series of deadly clashes between Palestinians and Israelis, including Israeli security forces, has marked much of October, with violent incidents reported in more than 50 different locations, including in East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem, Jenin, Tulkarm and Nablus.

According to the statement, the Secretary-General is also expected to meet with Israeli and Palestinian victims of these recent hostilities and terror attacks.

Speaking to the press alongside President Rivlin, Mr. Ban thanked him for receiving him “so warmly and at such short notice.”

“My visit reflects the sense of global alarm at the dangerous escalation in violence between Israelis and Palestinians,” Mr.
Ban declared. “I am here to encourage and support all efforts to lower tensions and prevent the situation from spinning out of control.”

The UN chief expressed his condolences to the families and loved ones of all the victims of the hostilities and terrorist attacks. “No society should have to live in fear,” he said. “No society can afford to see its youth suffer in hopelessness.”

Mr. Ban stressed that if action is not taken fast, the dynamics on the ground may only get worse, “with serious repercussions in and beyond Israel and Palestine.”

“It is not too late to avoid a broader crisis,” he insisted. “In my meetings today and tomorrow with the Israeli and Palestinian leadership, I will be appealing to all to take concerted steps to limit new incidents on both sides. Violence only begets violence.”

He added that extremists on either side, or those who think violence is the answer, must not be allowed to further fuel the conflict.

“Beyond the immediate tensions, what is missing is the resolve to restore a political horizon for talks, and a political process that delivers real results and hope,” Mr. Ban noted. “Violence only undermines the legitimate Palestinian aspirations for statehood and the longing of Israelis for security.”

Underlining that “the status quo is only making things worse,” the Secretary-General stated that this conflict has gone on for far too long.

“We must, for the future of our children, turn back from this dangerous abyss, safeguard the two-state solution and lead people back onto the road towards peace,” he urged, adding that the UN, and himself as Secretary-General, will continue to support all efforts to create the conditions for a return to meaningful negotiations and a just and lasting peace.

During his day in Israel, Mr. Ban also met with the Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and said he understands the duty weighing on the Israeli leader to ensure that his citizens can enjoy safety and security. He also urged Israel to guard against violent incidents, and to conduct thorough investigations when necessary.

“Mr. Prime Minister, the security challenges your Government is currently facing raise many complicated dilemmas and may require tightening of security measures,” the UN chief said speaking again to the press.

“However, security measures can be counterproductive if they are applied without special efforts to defuse situations before people lose their lives. If the use of force is not properly calibrated, it may breed the very frustrations and anxieties, from which violence tends to erupt,” he continued.

Later, the Secretary-General had a meeting with Isaac Herzog, the leader of the Zionist Union party, and Tzipi Livni, a member of Parliament and former Minister of Foreign Affairs.

A readout issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York indicated that he expressed particular concern with the situation at Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount and the religious dispute over it, which has “serious repercussions not only for Israel and Palestine but throughout the region.”
Central African Republic: Security Council condemns violence, reiterates decision to apply sanctions

The United Nations Security Council today expressed its deep concern about the recent upsurge of violence and instability in the Central African Republic (CAR), and reiterated its decision to apply an asset freeze and travel ban to those engaging in or providing support for acts that undermine the peace, stability or security of the country.

In a presidential statement adopted by the Council, members condemned the violence, including all attacks against civilians, intercommunal violence, targeted violence against women and children, lootings of humanitarian premises and attacks against United Nations peacekeepers.

“The Security Council emphasizes that some of these attacks may constitute war crimes and that those responsible for all abuses and violations of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable,” the statement stressed.

Meanwhile, the 15-member body reiterated its support for the Transitional Authorities, under the leadership of Catherine Samba-Panza as the Transitional Head of State, and called on all stakeholders in the CAR to commit to peace and reconciliation through the implementation of the agreements adopted at the Bangui Forum in May 2015.

The Council also took note of the “significant progress” achieved in the voters’ registration process, with an unprecedented number of citizens registered to date, highlighting the “critical importance and urgency” of holding the constitutional referendum and first rounds of presidential and legislative elections by the end of 2015, “in a free, fair, transparent manner.”

Emphasizing the continued role of the region, the Security Council encouraged countries to further use their leverage and regional meetings to encourage progress on the transition and towards these elections, and to prevent spoilers from attempting to disrupt these processes.

In addition, it called upon countries that contribute troops and police to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) to expedite the upgrading of their capabilities, and urged others to provide the necessary support to enable them to reach UN standards without any further delay.

MINUSCA, which was set up in April 2014 to help bring peace after a breakdown of governmental authority and vicious intercommunal fighting between mainly the Muslim Séléka group and the mainly Christian anti-Balaka movement, currently maintains nearly 11,000 uniformed personnel in the country.

The recent crisis was sparked in the capital, Bangui, on 26 September, when according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) violent clashes erupted between the residents of PK5 in Bangui’s 3rd district and the 5th district after the death of a young Muslim taxi motorcyclist. The violence left dozens of people dead and several injured. Houses were looted in other neighbourhoods and many burned. Thousands of people have fled the areas with heightened tension to seek refuge mostly with host families and in displacement sites.
UN refugee agency provides shelter to Iraqis uprooted in restive Anbar province

20 October - The UN refugee agency has opened its most recent camp for internally displaced persons in Iraq’s restive Anbar province – host to the largest number of 3.2 million Iraqis uprooted across the country and where more than 250,000 civilians have fled their homes over the past six months.

The new “Marzaki camp is strategically located close to the bridge connecting Anbar and Baghdad provinces so that residents can have access to safety in case conflict lines move closer to the camp,” said Bruno Geddo, Representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iraq.

“Displaced people scattered throughout the area in poor living conditions will now be able to properly settle down and benefit from medical and other services close by in Baghdad,” Mr. Geddo said in a press release issued in the Iraqi capital.

According to the agency, the new camp that opened Monday can provide shelter to some 3,000 displaced Iraqis who have been living in schools, unfinished buildings or staying with relatives around Ameriyat al-Fallujah in Anbar, which has become a safe haven for uprooted Iraqis in the province.

More than 250,000 civilians are estimated to have fled Ramadi since April, with the majority staying inside Anbar province itself living with host families, in informal settlements, unfinished buildings, schools or renting apartments.

Many of those fleeing Anbar are being denied access into Baghdad province due to security-driven restrictions and in recent months, thousands of Iraqis have been stranded for days on the Anbar side of the bridge, often staying in dire conditions without enough food or proper shelter, the agency said.

Among Markazi camp’s new residents is 23-year-old Rawa, her husband and three children, who fled Ramadi four months ago.

“Lacking a sponsor, Rawa’s family has not been granted access to Baghdad though her husband Mohammed who suffers from serious eye problems, is allowed to cross the bridge to seek medical treatment in the city,” according to the refugee agency.

“In any event, we wouldn’t be able to afford living there,” Rawa was quoting as saying.

There are currently some 3.2 million internally displaced Iraqis spread across 3,000 different locations across the country, according to the refugee agency, adding that Anbar province hosts the largest number of those uprooted – some 580,000 or 18 percent of the total displaced population.

The humanitarian situation is worsening dramatically as the crisis in Iraq has accelerated since last year, when militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL] took over large portions of Iraq.

UN humanitarian officials have warned that 10 million Iraqis, or a quarter of the population, are going to need humanitarian aid by year’s end amid “dramatically” worsening conditions that are forcing many people to leave their homeland because they no longer see a future inside their country.
Women worldwide live longer, healthier lives with better education, says new UN report

20 October - The lives of women and girls around the world have improved in several areas over the last 20 years but they continue to be victims of gender based discrimination and violence, according to a new report launched today by the United Nations.

Coming on the heels of the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), The World’s Women 2015 report brings into sharp perspective the need for gender equality outlined in Goal 5, which aims to empower all women and girls by 2030.

“We cannot achieve our 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, without full and equal rights for half of the world’s population, in law and in practice,” said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at a recent event on gender equality organized on the margins of the Sustainable Development Summit.

According to the report, prepared by the Statistics Division of the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, women live longer lives, benefit from a better access to education and are more independent.

Life expectancy has continued to rise, reportedly reaching 72 years for women and 68 for men, globally. Worldwide, the number of maternal deaths declined by 45 per cent between 1990 and 2013. Although they continue to marry a few years earlier than men, women’s age at marriage has also increased, reflecting higher education levels, later entry into the labour force, as well as increased economic independence.

Meanwhile, enrolment of children in primary education is nearly universal today. The gender gap has narrowed and once they have enrolled in school, the report finds that girls perform better than boys through primary education in two thirds of countries.

However in some developing nations the disparities against girls are stark. The UN estimates that today, 58 million children of primary school age are out of school worldwide. More than half of them are girls and nearly three quarters live in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. Although the vast majority of the world’s youth is currently literate, nearly two thirds of the world’s illiterate adults are women, a proportion unchanged for the last 20 years.

“For too many women and girls continue to be discriminated against, subjected to violence, denied equal opportunities in education and employment, and excluded from positions of leadership and decision-making,” underscored Mr. Ban.

Indeed, the study finds that over one third of women worldwide have been a victim of physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Attitudes towards violence are reportedly beginning to change as both men and women see violence against women less acceptable – but 60 per cent of all women victims of violence still do not report it or seek any help.

Turning to the issue of child marriage, despite remaining a critical issue in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, the occurrence has declined from 31 per cent in 1995 to 26 per cent in 2010.

Regarding employment, estimates reveal that only 50 per cent of women of working age are in the labour force, compared to 77 per cent of men. Women are found to remain concentrated in low paid jobs and earn on average between 70 and 90 per cent of what men earn.

Furthermore, women spend on average three hours more per day than men on household chores and caring for family members in developing countries and two hours more per day than men in developed countries. As a result of the gender division of paid and unpaid work, in many countries, women continue to be economically dependent on their spouses.
Meanwhile, women’s economic vulnerability becomes even more visible among lone mothers with children. One-parent household are increasingly common globally, both in developing and developed countries as a result of increased extramarital fertility and divorce. Lone mothers with children constitute about 75 per cent of all one-parent households and suffer higher poverty rates than lone father or two parent households.

The report also studied gender representation in leadership positions and found that in most societies around the world, women continue to have unequal voice in public and private spheres. The number of females among Heads of State or Government is still an exception, although the world currently counts 19 female, a slight improvement compared to the 12 counted in 1995.

Similarly, only 22 per cent of parliamentarians and 18 per cent of appointed ministers are women. Women’s representation among corporate managers, legislators and senior officials also remains low, with no country reaching or surpassing parity and only about half of countries having shares of 30 per cent or more.

The launch of the report coincides with the World Statistics Day, marked annually on 20 October to highlight the importance of statistics in helping policy makers develop informed policies that impact millions of people worldwide.

**At Security Council, heads of main UN bodies highlight ‘mutually reinforcing’ areas of concern**

20 October - During a debate on the working methods of the Security Council, the President of the General Assembly, as well as the Deputy Secretary-General and the Vice President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) emphasized the need for continued and improved interaction between the main bodies of the United Nations.

General Assembly President Mogens Lykketoft said the annual debate on the Security Council’s working methods was “extremely timely,” and noted “the benefit of the institutional relationship and interaction between the Security Council and the General Assembly, particularly this year, as together we bring forward the process to select and appoint the next Secretary General.”

Mr. Lykketoft continued by highlighting that the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council was “mutually reinforcing and complementary,” noting areas of work which were closely linked, such as peace and security issues, the UN Charter review, the appointment of the Secretary-General, and the relationship between the Council and some of the subsidiary organs established by the Assembly.

As an example of the interdependence of the work of the two bodies, Mr. Lykketoft mentioned the General Assembly’s election of five new, non-permanent members to the Security Council for 2016-2017.

He also noted that the working methods of the Security Council were of interest to the wider membership of the UN, and that at any given time, “some 178 Member States are not members of the Security Council,” and that 35 per cent of UN Member States had never served on the 15-member Council.

Turning his remarks to the appointment of the next Secretary-General, Mr. Lykketoft said that for years there had been “widespread calls for increased transparency, inclusivity and a more rigorous process in selecting the next chief of this Organization,” and that, as President of the General Assembly, he would be working with the President of the Security Council to begin the process of soliciting candidates.

He also highlighted the importance of including women among the candidates for the leadership position.

“I am absolutely confident that there are any number of potential female candidates who come with all these credentials and more,” said Mr. Lykketoft. “Bearing in mind that in 70 years the UN has never had a female Secretary-General, the inclusion and consideration of woman candidates should be an important focus for all of us as we ensure that this organization continues to advance gender equality on all levels.”
He also touched on the issue of Security Council reform, saying the subject was “of central importance to a large majority of the Membership” of the UN, and that the General Assembly had decided to immediately continue the intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform in its 70th session.

The Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Sven Jürgenson, also addressed the Security Council, calling the meeting “a welcome step in the improvement of cooperation between United Nations Charter bodies.”

Mr. Jürgenson spoke about ECOSOC’s relationship with the Council, noting that Article 65 of the UN Charter states that ECOSOC may furnish information to the Security Council and shall assist it upon request. This provision, he said, had seen very limited use.

“Its most constructive incarnation is probably the establishment in by the Economic and Social Council of its Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti,” he said, noting that the Group “continues to exist and contributes to the promotion of coherent and sustained development support to Haiti.”

Following the example of the Haiti Group, and responding to a request made by the General-Assembly, similar groups were set up for Guinea-Bissau and Burundi, which were active from 2003 to 2006, he added.

“These Groups, which promoted a comprehensive approach to peace and development in post conflict settings, prefigured the country specific configurations of the Peacebuilding Commission, for which they constituted an ‘avant garde,’” he said, which led to “enhanced interaction between ECOSOC and the Security Council.”

Mr. Jürgenson said that the relationship between the Charter bodies of the UN should be revitalized.

“The changing nature of conflict, from inter-State wars to complex civil conflicts that are intractable and reoccurring, highlights the fundamental link between sustainable development and lasting peace,” he said.

ECOSOC and the Security Council, he said, can interact on a regular basis on issues of concern to them both, from the promotion of institution building and improved governance to the consequences of economic and financial crises on global stability and the impact of environmental degradation on weakened societies.

“On each dimension of sustainable development, economic, social or environmental and on their contribution to the overall objective of peace, the UN development system, under the oversight of ECOSOC, has a lot to contribute,” he said. “The Economic and Social Council can be the counterpart of the Security Council to embrace a truly holistic approach to peace and security, an approach that world leaders have recognized as the only one which can lead to sustainable results.”

Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson also addressed the Security Council on its working methods, noting that the UN Secretariat “has always been and will remain a vital partner of the Council,” translating the mandates of the Security Council into peacekeeping operations, special political missions, sanctions monitoring groups, and other bodies.

He also spoke about the informal Working Group on Documentation and other procedural questions, noting that it was an important interface between the Council and the Secretariat.

“This Working Group has given more transparency to the Council’s work, through its crafting of Notes, subsequently issued by the President, documenting trends of relevance to the wider UN membership including to troop and police contributing countries,” he said.

He also outlined several decisions the Council had reached on its working methods, along with the actions that the Secretariat has taken to implement them, from monthly briefings provided by the Department of Political Affairs on situations which could turn into threats to international peace and security, as well as its work improving cooperation on sanctions through the Inter-Agency Working Group on UN Sanctions.
Greece’s overstretched reception centres may imperil EU-wide plan as arrivals hit half million mark – UN

20 October - As the number of refugee and migrant arrivals in Greece hits half a million, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has warned today of continuing “chaos” at overburdened reception centres – possibly threatening to undo Europe’s recently-agreed relocation programme – unless reception conditions in frontline islands are improved.

“The spike in arrivals in Greece is sharply increasing reception pressures on the islands,” said UNHCR spokesperson Melissa Fleming at the bi-weekly press briefing in Geneva. “Many of the refugees and migrants are desperate to quickly move onwards, fearing that borders ahead of them will close.”

“As of this morning, there were more than 27,500 people on the islands – either awaiting registration or onward transport to the mainland,” she continued.

“Additional police had to be called in on Sunday and yesterday to control the chaotic situation,” she said referring to an incident in which frustration amongst refugees and migrants boiled over at a reception centre on Lesvos, leading to the evacuation of UNHCR staff and the temporary suspension of processing.

Ms. Fleming emphasized that it was important that reception centres in Greece and other parts of Europe be up to the task. “Without this essential element, the relocation programme agreed by Europe in September is in serious peril and may fail,” she cautioned.

She also noted that Balkan routes for refugees and migrants had reopened after “chaotic and miserable scenes.”

“On the Serbian border with Croatia, some 3,000 people were left waiting amid uncertainty in the rain from Sunday until late Monday afternoon without shelter, and with minimal assistance on hand,” said Ms. Fleming.

“UNHCR staff and staff of our partner organizations provided what support they could at such short notice including food, water, and blankets. But many people, including the elderly, pregnant women and several physically handicapped people, were soaked through and instances of hypothermia were reported. There was similar misery on the Croatia-Slovenia border.”

An additional 4,300 people had arrived in Austria from Slovenia Monday and, in Austria and Germany, Ms. Fleming noted that tens of thousands of refugees and migrants were sleeping in tents and temporary shelters because of accommodation shortages.

She also spoke about the number of deaths at sea of refugees and migrants, noting that 19 people, including infants and children, had died in the past nine days in five separate incidents, almost half of these over the weekend. In total, at least 3,135 people have died in the Mediterranean in 2015, she added.

To address the situation, UNHCR recommends that various measures of stabilization are needed in countries of first asylum and all countries of secondary movements.

These measures include support to countries hosting the majority of Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees; an information campaign informing of the dangers of the sea journey; and the development of legal pathways to seek protection in Europe. In countries of secondary movement, significant efforts must be made to develop a robust reception and registration capacity.
Recent floods deal devastating blow to agricultural livelihoods and food security in Myanmar – UN

20 October - A new joint United Nations agency-Myanmar Government report paints a grim picture of the destruction caused by flooding in the country, where more than half a million hectares of rice paddy were affected and almost a quarter of a million livestock were killed, including poultry, cattle, pigs and goats, when Cyclone Komen struck in late July and early August this year.

A press release on the findings, compiled by the Government alongside the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), reveals rice to have been the most-affected crop, with an expected slash in production of up to 89 per cent in damaged paddy fields, compared to the same time last year.

Some parts of the country lost entire paddy plantations. Seeds, fertilizers and tools were also lost in the disaster, says the report, underscoring that many farmers risk missing the start of the upcoming winter and summer agriculture seasons.

More than 250 thousand livestock have been lost in the six worst-affected regions/states assessed, which hit women especially hard as they are generally in charge of these animals. For restocking of small livestock FAO and WFP highlight the provision of animal feed and vaccines for preventing the spread of disease and supporting the survival of animals.

Flooding was also devastating for the aquaculture and fishing industries in Myanmar have also been affected based on FAO’s and WFP’s observation in worst-affected regions, with almost 30,000 hectares of fish and shrimp ponds gone, as well as fishing equipment, such as nets, traps, boats and engines.

FAO and WFP stressed that the states and regions of Ayeyarwady, Bago, Chin, Magway, Rakhine and Sagaing were among the worst-affected by the floods, and most families in those areas are heavily dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Cyclone Komen struck Myanmar in late July and early August this year, bringing strong winds and additional heavy rains to Myanmar, resulting in floods and landslides. According to the National Natural Disaster Management Committee, 122 people lost their lives and up to 1.6 million people were displaced.

FAO and WFP called for more international support to replace livestock, seeds, fertilizer, tools and equipment for affected farmers. In addition, the affected communities need assistance to rehabilitate land, irrigation systems and access roads.

“Half of all losses were in agriculture, in regions where people rely on crop production and livestock to feed their families,” said Bui Thi Lan, FAO Representative in Myanmar. “We must urgently meet the immediate needs of these families, support agricultural recovery and help them rebuild resilient livelihoods to cope better with future crises.”

WFP Resident Representative and Country Director Dom Scalpelli highlighted the need for urgent asset creation programmes to benefit the most vulnerable and food-insecure communities. “These activities will provide the necessary cash to cope with the immediate emergency needs as well as help rehabilitate productive assets for early recovery after the shock,” he said.

WFP and FAO also warned that the flooding could have other consequences for poverty and economic development. Additional findings of the assessment show that affected populations have begun to engage in “distress coping mechanisms such as borrowing money and selling productive assets in order to access food.”

The report concludes that rehabilitation of infrastructure, such as irrigation schemes, has been identified as a priority by affected populations assessed.
With winter closing in, UN relief wing races against time to reach isolated areas of Nepal

20 October - As the approaching winter has left a small time window for aid workers to reach earthquake-hit, high-altitude areas in Nepal, the United Nations humanitarian wing and its partners are racing against the clock to ensure timely delivery of food and shelter supplies to the isolated communities.

“It is of critical importance to deliver supplies to the trailheads by end of October as the passes in the Himalayas will be at increased risk of being blocked by snowfall,” said a statement issued late last week by the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Nepal.

Available land access trails, especially to high altitude regions, will be cut off soon with the onset of winter, thus making the humanitarian agencies rush to safeguard distribution of urgent relief of food and shelter items, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

However, the recent monsoon has limited road and air delivery, leaving a backlog of 1,200 metric tonnes of shelter and non-food items pending delivery to the earthquake-struck communities.

While most supplies are in local storage, the serious fuel shortage delays scheduled deliveries to affected villages with mules and porters as further transportation through trailhead.

“The humanitarian community is implementing contingencies to address the fuel shortages and to increase its capacity to deliver the supplies within an ever decreasing window of opportunity,” said the statement.

‘Actions by States are increasingly transnational,’ UN expert warns, stressing absolute prohibition against torture

20 October - The UN Special Rapporteur on torture Juan Méndez today urged governments across the world not to allow a vacuum of human rights protection even when they act beyond their borders, saying “torture is torture here, there and everywhere.”

“Actions by states are increasingly transnational in nature, which has significant impact on the fundamental rights of individuals outside their borders,” Mr. Méndez said presenting his latest report to the UN General Assembly.

“Extraterritorial practices include cross-border military operations or use of force the occupation of foreign territories; anti-migration operations; peacekeeping; the detention of persons abroad; extraditions, rendition to justice, and extraordinary rendition; and the exercise of de facto control or influence over non-State actors operating in foreign territories,” according to the report, “Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

The independent human rights expert warned that “States must not undermine the absolute legal prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment by evading or limiting responsibility for extraterritorial acts or effects caused by their agents.”

He also drew attention to “the absolute prohibition of non-refoulement applies at all times, even when States are holding individuals or operating extraterritorially, such as during border control operations on the high seas.”
The principle of non-refoulement is the cornerstone of asylum and of international refugee law, and means the expulsion of persons who have the right to be recognised as refugees.

“I am calling upon States to exercise jurisdiction over acts of torture and ill-treatment, regardless of the locus where wrongfulness took place, and to provide civil remedies and rehabilitation for victims of acts of torture or other ill-treatment, regardless of who bears responsibility for mistreatment or where it took place,” Mr. Méndez said.

Mr. Méndez was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council as the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in November 2010. He is independent from any government and serves in his individual capacity. He serves in his individual capacity and does not receive a salary for his work.

UN rights experts call for release of Qatari poet jailed for writing and reciting poem

20 October - United Nations human rights experts today urged the Government of Qatar to release Mohammed al-Ajami, a poet who is currently serving a 15-year prison sentence for writing and reciting a poem at his home.

“The arrest, detention and sentencing of Mohammed al-Ajami in October 2013 seem to be solely related to the peaceful exercise of his fundamental human rights,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, David Kaye.

Mr. al-Ajami was arrested in 2010 for reciting one of his poems in his house, which criticized the Crown Prince of Qatar while praising the Tunisian revolution and denouncing corruption and oppression by Arab rulers. He was initially sentenced to life imprisonment, which was reduced to 15 years after an appeal made in 2013.

“The 15 years prison sentence against this poet is also particularly worrying, as we have received serious indications that the criminal process did not meet all the judicial guarantees of a fair trial,” stressed the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Mónica Pinto.

The UN Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, Farida Shaheed also insisted that Mr. al-Ajami’s sentence is ‘disproportionate and amounts to political censorship to art and expression’.

“Artists have the right to dissent, to use political, religious and economic symbols as a counter-discourse to dominant powers, and to express their own belief and world vision,” said Ms. Shaheed.

The Special Rapporteurs collectively agreed that legal provisions provided to justify the penalty are contrary to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which protect the right to freedom of opinion and expression including in the form of arts.

They stressed that penalizing criticism against the Emir’s and Vice-Emir’s authority is in violation of international standards.

“Laws restricting the right to freedom of expression must never be used as tools for silencing the criticism of authorities and promoting political censorship,” Mr. Kaye stressed.

Mr.al Ajami's case has been followed closely by the UN experts and the matter was also raided with Qatari authorities by several UN human rights mechanisms since 2012.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.
On World Statistics Day, UN flags importance of reliable data to achieve new development agenda

20 October - Emphasizing that “reliable and timely statistics and indicators are more important than ever,” United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged all partners and stakeholders to work together to achieve the ambitious 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

“On this World Statistics Day, I urge all partners and stakeholders to work together to ensure that the necessary investments are made, adequate technical capacity is built, new data sources are explored and innovative processes are applied to give all countries the comprehensive information systems they need to achieve sustainable development,” Mr. Ban said in a message.

Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the UN Statistics Division in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, elaborated by saying that “it is clear that the significantly broader development agenda with a higher focus on disaggregation will require more resources, new methodological developments, integration of new data sources with traditional ones, the building of partnerships and increased cooperation within and across countries.”

“Sustainable development will need to be supported by sustainable Statistics,” Mr. Schweinfest declared, referring to the newly-adopted UN post-2015 development framework.

Mr. Ban said that as countries and organizations embark on implementing the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reliable and timely statistics and indicators are more important than ever.

“We need to ensure that everyone is counted, especially the most poor and vulnerable,” he said. “No child’s birth shall remain unregistered. No incidence of disease, no matter how remote the location, shall remain unrecorded.”

The UN chief said “local statistics” are needed to ensure that every child has access to education while “global statistics” are needed to monitor the effects of climate change.

Also marking the Day, the UN Statistics Division will launch in New York the new World’s Women 2015: Trends and Statistics report, which presents the latest statistics and analyses of the status of women and men in areas of concern identified by the landmark 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. It also reviews progress towards gender equality over the past 20 years.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP) will celebrate World Statistics Day with a talk on why investing in primary and secondary data collection and analysis are fundamental for the design and implementation of food assistance programmes worldwide.

And the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is releasing today its new FAO Statistical Pocketbook 2015 and a special statistics publication focusing on coffee and includes country profiles with key indicators related to coffee for selected years.
UN agency reaches Donetsk after months of restricted humanitarian access

20 October - The World Food Programme (WFP) today announced that after a three-month suspension, it has restarted humanitarian activities in the non-Government-controlled area of Donetsk city in eastern Ukraine.

In a press statement, the UN agency said that two truck convoys, carrying enough food for nearly 16,000 people for one month, had reached Donetsk over the past five days.

“This food will help people who have been displaced by the conflict, who have lost their jobs and left their homes, and who have been deprived of humanitarian assistance for the past three months,” said WFP Head of Office in Ukraine Giancarlo Stopponi.

More convoys will be bringing food to provide assistance to 20,000 vulnerable people. WFP is coordinating the food distribution through its partner People in Need, an international non-governmental organization.

The agency also highlighted the challenges humanitarian organizations are facing in getting access to nearly 5 million people who are affected by the conflict that began in the region in April 2014.

During the three months of suspension, WFP said that it continued to provide assistance to people in Government-controlled areas of both Donetsk and Luhansk and in areas near the frontline and in buffer-zone villages.

The agency added that it is concerned about the needs of the most vulnerable people and those who had to flee their homes, especially since winter is approaching.