In the headlines:

- At UN, religious and political leaders weigh strategies to stem rising tide of intolerance, extremism
- ‘Respect for UN flag disappearing,’ UN relief chief warns as aid workers increasingly targeted for violence
- ‘Swift, courageous’ action needed to stem tide of illegal migration – UNICEF
- Displaced Iraqis face mounting difficulties as fighting continues between Government forces and ISIL
- UN rights official cites Afghanistan’s ‘paradox’ of new opportunities for peace amid growing violence
- Yemen: UN agency warns of deteriorating health situation amid ongoing fighting
- Ban urges ridding the world of chemical weapons ‘once and for all’ on 100th anniversary of their first use
- In Bogotá, UN deputy rights chief says ‘peace is the only option’ for Colombia
- UN partnership puts marmalade from Ethiopian village on ‘Eataly’ store shelves
- In phone call, Ban and Ukraine President discuss peace efforts amid ongoing conflict
- Wanted: Young entrepreneur to address UN General Assembly session on climate change
- UN rights experts welcome Pakistan Supreme Court decision to suspend death penalty

More stories inside

At UN, religious and political leaders weigh strategies to stem rising tide of intolerance, extremism

21 April - Senior United Nations officials today called on the international community “in the name of our shared humanity to unite in courage and resolve” against intolerance at a critical time when people, communities and nations are grappling with disparity and radicalism.

Opening the two-day high-level meeting on Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation, Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism, General Assembly President Sam Kutesa said 2015 is a year of hope as the world formulates a new development agenda.

However, with “troubling frequency” violent attacks and despicable crimes are being carried out and claiming the lives of innocent men, women and children. From Paris to Tunis, and from Garissa to Yarmouk and Johannesburg to Peshawar, “no person, society of nation is immune” from intolerance or the threat of violent extremism, he added. In places like Iraq Afghanistan and Mali, irreplaceable artefacts are being destroyed.

“There is no justification for such attacks. We must condemn all manifestations of intolerance, including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and racism,” and all other forms of prejudice, harassment or violence, the General Assembly President said.
Today's gathering brings together leaders representing Islam, Judaism, Christianity as well as ministers, academics, clerics and spiritual leaders to discuss ways to foster peaceful, inclusive societies and counter violent extremism. In line with that agenda, Mr. Kutesa said that given today's globalized world it is incumbent that world leaders – be they political, religious, or spiritual – work together to address serious challenges posed by violent extremism.

Divisions foster discontent and societies that fail to be inclusive foster radicalization. Addressing the challenges of poverty and lack of education can form a holistic approach for peaceful society and foster the environment for future development. Lack of the rule of law and ethnic, national and religious discrimination can also contribute to intolerance, said Mr. Kutesa.

On the flip side, faith and interfaith collaboration as seen throughout history can build trusting relationships, he said. Many religious leaders have emphasized the need for peace and tolerance. And concerted efforts should be made to support these religious leaders to help them spread their message of hope and peace and stamp out bigotry, racism, and intolerance.

“We must promote dialogue, mutual understanding and strengthen the principles of freedom,” Mr. Kutesa said, underscoring the role women, youth and the media play in fostering tolerance.

“In the classrooms around the world, we should emphasize values that are rooted in the principles of dignity and respect…and within our families, we not only have the opportunity but indeed the obligation to teach our children how to treat each other with kindness and respect,” he added.

Taking to the General Assembly podium next, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that “too many communities have been shattered and too many people have been cynically pitted against each other.”

As such stories become all too common the world must stand up toward the threat of intolerance and radicalism. “Violent extremism is a global test and our response must solve the problem,” Mr. Ban said.

D’aesh, Al Shabaab and Boko Haram are part of a new generation of terrorist groups threatening international peace and security but the problem goes beyond them and the regions in which they operate. Racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia exists worldwide and to protect the innocent “we must safeguard our moral compass,” he said.

Abuses committed in the face of anti-terrorism only allow terrorists to gain more ground. “The formula for disaster is clear,” Mr. Ban continued. “When insecurities and frustration are fuelled by leaders who exploit differences the result is mistrust” that is likely to erupt in violence and extremists take advantage of this.

Member States must “honestly confront our own faults,” the UN Chief emphasized, calling on States to consider how their actions cause breeding grounds for brutality and any economic measure that may also be at play.

We cannot leave on the margins any person – women, the disabled, indigenous, poor and vulnerable. We must lay foundations for accountability even as we work for peace. Past violations must be addressed because without transitional justice tensions will deepen just as society is heeling, the Secretary-General warned.

“Throughout history, there have been brave individuals who have transcended their identity, risked and gave their own lives for what they knew was right and in the process they inspired others to take the same course,” Mr. Ban added.

Addressing the General Assembly next, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, High Representative of the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), said that tolerance and reconciliation are values inherent in all major faiths. But “sadly for the past few years we have witnessed unimaginable violence, terrorism and atrocities in the name of religious,” he pointed out.

“Today, the United Nations is writing history. This meeting is a step in the right direction,” Mr. Al-Nasser added.

“The reason we are here is to hear from you, political and religious leaders in how we can counter extreme violence and prevent relapsing whole societies into the black hole of cultural and ethnic tensions,” Mr. Al-Nasser said.

“We know from our experiences, from both successes and failures, that no matter how much we improve our securities,
terrorism will not go away unless we address the conditions conducive to its growth,” he added.

To do so effectively, Member States need to work together across sectors and faiths, including Governments, Member States, religious leaders, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists.

“We cannot make progress on any development without your participation,” he told the General Assembly, emphasizing that to deliver on its mandate the United Nations needs the support of the women and men who lead faith communities.

“We equally need responsible leaders of Heads of State and Governments to find durable solutions to our various crises from water access to education and from regional conflicts to fighting communicable diseases,” he said, adding that “no nation can succeed alone in these tasks.”

Moreover, young people need space and opportunity to play a role in decision-making. Many young people who are politically active are frustrated because of a lack of opportunity and jobs.

“Peace, stability, intercultural harmony and Sustainable Development are closely inter-linked and mutually reinforcing,” Mr. Al-Nasser added.

“We need to protect our future and our generations from the forces that fuel tensions, hatred and violence,” he said.

‘Respect for UN flag disappearing,’ UN relief chief warns as aid workers increasingly targeted for violence

21 April - Yesterday’s “horrific” attack on the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) staff in Somalia is a reminder of the dangers many aid workers face on a daily basis, the top UN humanitarian official said today, urging that those who perpetrated the attacks be held accountable.

Four UNICEF staff members were killed yesterday when a roadside bomb exploded alongside their minivan as they travelled to work in Garowe, northern Somalia.

“Aid workers are increasingly targets, with serious consequences for our ability to reach people who urgently need help,” Valerie Amos, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a press release.

“Attacks on humanitarian workers can constitute a war crime and are in total violation of international humanitarian and human rights law.”

According to the UN, such attacks have increased every year for more than a decade. In 2013, they reached a record high of 264 attacks, affecting 474 aid workers.

“Respect for the United Nations flag and the Red Cross and Red Crescent flag is disappearing,” Ms. Amos emphasized.

“When aid workers are attacked, they are unable to help people. Those who target aid workers are penalizing the most vulnerable people in the world; those who are struggling to survive. They are violating every principle of humanity and common decency,” the UN humanitarian chief said.

In a statement honouring the victims today, UNICEF released the names of the four colleagues, who had been working since 2014 on vaccination against poliomyelitis, social mobilization with local communities, education, and administration.

“These heroes were dedicated to building a better world for children – today, all of us at UNICEF honour their sacrifice,” the statement said.
“Our thoughts are with the families of all who died, with those who were injured, and with all our staff who continue to work tirelessly in Somalia to support women and children,” it added.

Five other UNICEF colleagues are being treated for injuries sustained in the attack, and the agency looks forward to their speedy recovery. Two local security personnel, unrelated to UNICEF, were also killed as a result of the attack, and four others injured.

‘Swift, courageous’ action needed to stem tide of illegal migration – UNICEF

21 April - The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has urged the international community to commit to “swift, collective and courageous action” and address the surge in illegal migration across the Mediterranean Sea which has resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives.

In a statement issued earlier today, UNICEF warned that reports of tragedies on the Mediterranean were becoming “all too frequent and the human cost all too high,” adding that children often shouldered the greater burden of illegal migration and its repercussions.

“Children who find themselves on these journeys are exposed to abuse, exploitation and possibly death and, if they survive, are often placed in unsafe and unsuitable conditions and / or criminalized,” the statement declared.

“We ask that all actions are guided by the best interests of every one of these children, every step of the way,” it continued. “No matter their refugee or migrant status, children are to be cared for in a safe place – and not in a detention facility – with access to education, health, social and legal services with full implementation of existing safeguards especially for the most vulnerable.”

Italy’s ‘Mare Nostrum,’ a major search and rescue programme aimed at saving migrants in the Mediterranean, was replaced in December 2014 by the European Union’s current ‘Triton’ operation amid an uptick in sea crossings in the region. Nonetheless, the number of casualties for this year has already grown to 1,600 – almost half of the 2014 total of 3,500.

2015, in fact, has seen some 31,500 people make crossings to Italy and Greece – the first and second largest countries of arrival respectively. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) has reported that numbers have also been recently picking up as weather conditions in the Mediterranean improve.

“With the start of the warmer weather in Europe when numbers of migrants are likely to rise, decisive action could avoid more senseless deaths,” UNICEF concurred in its statement.

“This means following the EU’s existing safeguards for unaccompanied minors, strengthening search-and-rescue capacities to save and protect lives, prosecuting human traffickers, and tackling the root causes of migration in countries of origin – conflict, poverty and discrimination – to avoid more tragic losses.”

Meanwhile, UNHCR has announced it has completed its run of interviews with survivors of last weekend’s deadly boat capsizing in which over 800 people are presumed to have died.

The interviews – conducted by UNHCR staff on the ground in Sicily – revealed that the boat departed from Tripoli, Libya on the morning of 18 April with some 850 people on board, including 350 Eritreans as well as people from Syria, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Côte d’Ivoire and Ethiopia. Only 28 people are known to have survived the shipwreck.

“The migrants looked exhausted, fragile, astonished to see so many people waiting for them,” said UNHCR spokesperson Carlotta Sami. “They will need psychological support. They are receiving food and water.”
Against that backdrop, in a press release issued earlier this afternoon the UN Committee on the Rights of Migrant Workers (CMW) said voiced its shock and dismay at “the appalling loss of life” in the Mediterranean.

“While it is true that there is no magic solution to immediately solve this issue, three things are crystal clear to the Committee,” observed CMW Chairperson Francisco Carrion Mena.

Mr. Carrion Mena outlined the need for enhanced search and rescue capabilities to save people in distress, the better management of migration flows by European authorities, and a greater effort by the international community to tackle the roots causes of illegal migration.

“The drivers of poverty and conflict which push people to take the extreme action of crossing the seas in search of work, peace and decent living conditions are not going to disappear without concerted action by States,” he declared.

Later in the day, the Security Council, in a statement issued to the press in New York, deplored the maritime tragedy, and expressed grave concern at the recent proliferation of, and endangerment of lives by, the smuggling of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea, off the coast of Libya.

“The members of the Security Council expressed their concern at the implications for regional stability posed by transnational organized crime and illicit activities such as the smuggling of migrants,” said the statement, by which the Council condemned and deplored such acts and underlined the need to bring the perpetrators of these acts to justice.

Against such a backdrop, the Council called for the full implementation by State Parties of the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

**Displaced Iraqis face mounting difficulties as fighting continues between Government forces and ISIL**

21 April - The United Nations refugee agency today warned about the difficulties facing thousands of Iraqi civilians fleeing violence, including dwindling resources, checkpoints, entry restrictions and security procedures to navigate on their journeys to safety.

According to a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection of Refugees, Volker Turk, recently returned to Geneva from a trip to Iraq, where 114,000 have recently been displaced from the city of Ramadi, in Anbar province, as fighting between Government forces and extremists intensified.

Of the total, around 54,000 have gone to Baghdad, 15,000 to Sulaimaniyah in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, 2,100 to Babylon and around 900 to Diyala. Around 39,000 of those displaced remain in Anbar, with many unable to move further afield.

Inside Anbar, internally displaced people (IDPS) seek shelter wherever they can find it, in places such as Khalidiya and Amriyat Al Fallujah, southeast of Fallujah, where they stay with relatives and host families or seek shelter in mosques and schools. Overcrowding is a major issue and in one community centre in Al Habaniya, people displaced from previous waves of violence shared space with new arrivals; in some cases as many as four families share a single tent.

“We are also concerned about the processing arrangements in place at the Bzabz bridge – a series of pontoons across the Euphrates River, about 65 kilometres west of Baghdad, which marks the boundary between Anbar and the capital,” UNHCR spokesman Adrian Edwards told journalists. “We are also liaising with the Iraqi authorities, advocating for them to ease restrictions on the movement of people to safe areas.”

People waiting on the Anbar side had no shelter and faced worsening conditions. The newly displaced were exhausted and anxious to move on to more secure locations. Some people had walked for miles without food and water.
“While more people have been able to move into Baghdad in recent days, reports overnight suggest many displaced people are now waiting in Diyala trying to cross into the Kurdistan region of Iraq,” Mr. Edwards said.

UNHCR has distributed mattresses, blankets, kitchen utensils, hygiene sets, fans and coolers to 8,000 people in Ameriyat Al Fallujah and Baghdad in recent days, with more distribution to another 12,000 people underway.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP) said the agency has provided food assistance to around 60,000 people fleeing Ramadi. She added that continued relief efforts would require financial support from the international community because $250 million was needed for emergency operations between now and September for emergency operations and logistics.

UN rights official cites Afghanistan’s ‘paradox’ of new opportunities for peace amid growing violence

21 April - At the end of a seven-day mission to Afghanistan, a senior United Nations’ human rights official today described the “paradoxical situation” in which the country finds itself.

“On the one hand, there are new opportunities for peace talks that would have been unimaginable only a few months ago,” said Ivan Šimonović, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights. “On the other, the conflict looks set to intensify as insurgents test the strength of the security forces hoping to gain leverage in future negotiations.”

Mr. Šimonović, who visited Kabul and the provinces of Nangarhar and Kapisa, said recent violence underlined the fact that it would be Afghan civilians who pay the price, with more work needed to be done to protect them.

“2014 was already a terrible year for the civilian population of Afghanistan and figures for the first quarter of 2015 have confirmed that negative trend,” he said referring to statistics compiled by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which pointed to the deaths of 655 civilians and injuries to 1,155 more in the first quarter of 2015.

During his second official visit to Afghanistan, the Assistant Secretary-General focused on the increasingly difficult security situation following the withdrawal of foreign troops and the transfer of security tasks to the Afghan National Security Forces.

He met with children detained for conflict-related crimes, including attempted suicide bombing, as well as civilian victims and their doctors at an emergency hospital in Kabul. Mr. Šimonović was in Jalalabad on Saturday at the same time as a suicide attack by anti-Government elements on a crowded marketplace, which killed at least 35 people.

“It is unacceptable that Afghans should face such violence on a daily basis,” he said. “There can be no doubt that the use of tactics of this kind represent war crimes, and those responsible for organizing or perpetrating such attacks must be brought to justice.”

While encouraging Afghanistan to institutionalize torture prevention by ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, which would lay the basis for a national inspection mechanism for places of detention, Mr. Šimonović welcomed the Government’s commitment to eradicating that scourge.

“I was greatly encouraged by President Ghani’s and Chief Executive Abdullah’s personal commitment to ending torture in Afghan detention facilities, and the steps being taken to prepare a national action plan on torture prevention,” he said. “These institutional reforms must be reinforced by strict accountability measures. Torturers must be prosecuted and punished, not transferred to other positions.”

Mr. Šimonović also helped launch a new report by UNAMA and the UN Human Rights Office on barriers to justice still faced by women.
“Clearly the gains for women’s rights in Afghanistan need to be reinforced and protected,” Mr. Šimonović said. “I welcome the appointment this week of four women ministers, and the imperative now should be to ensure women’s representation in key institutions like the police and judiciary, and participation in the peace process.”

Yemen: UN agency warns of deteriorating health situation amid ongoing fighting

21 April - The health situation in Yemen is steadily deteriorating as escalating hostilities impede civilian access to critical health services, according to a spokesperson for the World Health Organization (WHO).

Briefing reporters in Geneva earlier today, WHO’s Tarik Jašarević said sources within Yemen’s Ministry of Health were warning about the possible collapse of health services as clinics and hospitals around the country struggle to function while facing medicine and health supply shortages.

Power cuts and fuel shortages were also threatening to disrupt the UN agency’s ongoing vaccine operation, he said, leaving millions of children under the age of five unvaccinated and at increased risk of communicable diseases like measles and polio.

In addition, limited access to safe water has also led to a spike in cases of bloody diarrhoea in children below five, as well as increased cases of measles and suspected malaria.

Before the current conflict exploded, Yemen was ranked 50th out of 194 countries in terms of highest under five mortality rate which, he said, added to the burden already facing the country’s children.

According to the UN’s overview of the situation on the ground, the fighting in Yemen has steadily escalated in recent weeks, spreading throughout the country and into urban areas and residential neighbourhoods.

Civilian infrastructure has reportedly been destroyed as airstrikes and shelling have hit hospitals, schools, airports and mosques. At the same time, reports of serious human rights violations being committed are also emerging.

Mr. Jašarevic also warned that as of 17 April health facilities across the country had reported 944 deaths and 3,487 injured – a significant increase in casualty figures since the last reporting period.

Ban urges ridding the world of chemical weapons ‘once and for all’ on 100th anniversary of their first use

21 April - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has reminded the international community on the anniversary of the first use of chemical weapons in a Belgian battlefield 100 years ago today and amid allegations of their continued use, the only fitting tribute is to rid the world of these indiscriminate arms “once and for all.”

Confirmation of the use of chemical weapons in Syria two years ago served as “a shocking reminder” that their use has not yet been consigned to history said the Secretary-General in a message delivered on his behalf by Virginia Gamba, Deputy to the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, at a ceremony in Ypres, Belgium, where the first chemical attack was recorded 100 years ago today.

“The only fitting tribute to the memory of those who died at Ypres, and to all victims of chemical warfare, is to rid the world of chemical weapons once and for all,” Mr. Ban said in a message delivered by Virginia Gamba, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, at an event held at the site of the Second Battle of Ypres.
“The horrors of the First World War must be recalled as we grapple with today’s security challenges,” he said. “On this solemn anniversary, we remember the atrocities with the resolve to make sure that unlike that gas, the threats do not linger.”

The UN chief recalled that the first time that chemical weapons had been deployed on a large scale in battle helped prompt the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which banned the use of chemical weapons outright.

And some 70 years later, the Chemical Weapons Convention prohibited the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer and use of chemical weapons, and it also required States Parties to destroy any chemical weapons they owned or possessed.

“The Geneva Protocol and the Chemical Weapons Convention are accepted as an indispensable part of the international norm against chemical weapons,” Mr. Ban said.

He also praised the multinational effort to eliminate the chemical weapons programme of Syria “as a momentous undertaking and an important achievement” that “reaffirmed international resolve against chemical weapons, and it illustrated the power of collective action in the service of a common goal.”

But at the same time, he said: “We owe it to the victims of chemical weapons over the past 100 years – and future generations at risk of attacks – to remember that the world is not free from this threat.”

Noting that “allegations of the use of chemical weapons continue,” Mr. Ban said that “some of these allegations surround the use of chlorine gas is a bitter irony and a reminder that the international community cannot be complacent about its achievements, nor can it allow the taboo that surrounds such weapons to fade.”

Chlorine gas was used at Ypres on April 21, 1915, and is reportedly the same type of gas used in Syria.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapon (OPCW) marked the Centennial Commemoration of the first large-scale use of chemical weapons at Ypres and honoured the memory of and paid tribute to all victims of chemical weapons.

According to OPCW, chemical weapons resulted in more than one million casualties, and nearly 100,000 deaths during the First World War.

In Bogotá, UN deputy rights chief says ‘peace is the only option’ for Colombia

21 April - The road to peace is a complex and winding one, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights said today during her visit to Colombia, a country with a “unique opportunity to evolve into a society” where everyone enjoys rights equally and without discrimination.

“I am aware that not everyone is convinced that peace is the best option for Colombia. But it is clear that peace is the best – the only – option,” said Flavia Pansieri, who travelled to Bogotá, Putumayo and Cauca where she met with authorities, ministers, representatives of civil society, as well as women, indigenous, afro-descendants and peasant organizations.

These groups have suffered disproportionately from Colombia’s protracted conflict, Ms. Pansieri said at a press conference. “They tell us stories of suffering and abuses they have suffered, not just because of the conflict, but because of a system that has historically discriminated and dispossessed them.”

During the armed conflict, over seven million victims suffered large-scale violations of human rights and humanitarian law, the Deputy rights chief stated, stressing the importance of special mechanisms of transitional justice. Now the State must increase attention to the rights of these groups - including basic rights, which are enjoyed in the richer parts of this country.
“In a modern Colombia there cannot be indigenous or Afro-descendant children who die of easily preventable illnesses, or because the water they drink is polluted with toxic waste produced by uncontrolled mining,” Ms. Pansieri said.

She also praised the dialogue initiatives which are taking place throughout the country, 46 of which the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is participating in. She emphasized the importance of the “unique consultation mechanism,” which allows all parties to understand each other’s needs and perspectives.

“People have the right to defend human rights and I want to stress the direct responsibility of the State in creating a climate of protection, in which these terrible acts become unacceptable. The best way to ensure this is through the investigation, prosecution and punishment of those who threaten and attack human rights defenders,” she said.

In discussions with different authorities on the progress made in prosecutions for extrajudicial executions carried out to inflate statistics on combat killings –what became known as ‘false positives’ – she urged the Ministry of Defence to support the investigation, prosecution and sanction of these crimes.

“Ending impunity for ‘false positives’ will ensure that victims’ rights are recognized and that these crimes will not be repeated anywhere in Colombia,” Ms. Pansieri said. “I would like to insist on the need for Colombia to act in line with human rights standards, which ensure respect for human rights and legitimacy in the use of force.”

These mechanisms can help ensure, in a comprehensive manner, not only justice but also truth, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition. There is an imperative need for Colombia to develop judicial and non-judicial measures to help society deal with the human rights and international humanitarian law violations of the past.

While commending the current Government’s commitment to truth, justice and reparation for victims, she also insisted on the need for more coordination and cooperation mechanisms between State institutions.

“I also call on the Government to pay special attention to the demobilization and reintegration of girls and boys, preferably through a plan of action that will address the grave violations committed against them,” Ms. Pansieri said.

The international community has a major responsibility to accompany this process, she said, welcoming the international community to continue assisting the country in the promotion and protection of human rights, with the aim of achieving sustainable and lasting peace.

“I am conscious of the enormous challenges that exist. But I am convinced that with the participation of all sectors of society, a better future is guaranteed for Colombia for this generation and the next,” she said.

**UN partnership puts marmalade from Ethiopian village on ‘Eataly’ store shelves**

21 April - Who could have imagined that a small group of women farmers from a remote village could get their marmalade made from prickly cactus pears to a major European market like Eataly in Rome?

“The jam jars are an example of the powerful role that such creative partnerships can make in empowering family farmers and facilitating their access to global markets,” the Rome-based United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said in a press release.

FAO and Eataly joined forces two years ago to support family farmers around the globe in boosting their production and finding ways to reach new overseas customers.

One example of that collaboration is their support of a women’s cooperative from Ethiopia’s Tigray region, which produced more than 3,300 pounds of cactus pear marmalade that are fully in line with both Ethiopian and European food safety standards.
Now shoppers can purchase the marmalade, packaged in 4,000 jars, being sold by Eataly in Rome, according to FAO. “We are here to recognize the role of family farmers and especially the role of women who are key to achieving food security in Africa,” said FAO Director-General Graziano da Silva at an event held at the Eataly store in Rome. “FAO is grateful to Eataly which is giving the opportunity to this product to be distributed as a gourmet product here in Europe.”

The partnership was supported by the Italian Development Cooperation agency, according to FAO.

The teamwork with Eataly is an example of FAO’s focus on partnerships. Since 2013, the agency has signed over 60 agreements with a wide range of different stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, non-governmental organizations, cooperatives and academia.

**In phone call, Ban and Ukraine President discuss peace efforts amid ongoing conflict**

21 April - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has spoken with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko about the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine and continuing international efforts to mediate a peace in the war-torn region, a United Nations spokesperson has confirmed.

In a phone call yesterday, the two leaders discussed and agreed on the need for the full implementation of the so-called Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements, which aims to broker an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire in Ukraine’s Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

Moreover, the Secretary-General also stressed the “urgent need for traction” on the political elements of these agreements for the betterment of the humanitarian situation on the ground. Meanwhile, regarding the possible creation of an international peacekeeping mission under a UN mandate, Mr. Ban reiterated that this would be a matter for the Security Council to decide.

The UN Human Rights Office and the World Health Organization estimate that since April 2014, at least 6,116 people, both military personnel and civilians, have been killed and 15,474 wounded. The actual number of casualties could be considerably higher, as hundreds remain missing and hundreds of bodies are still pending recovery.

At the same time, reports suggest that fighting has intensified, especially in the vicinity of the Donetsk airport and near the village of Shyrokine in the Donetsk region, where heavy weapons, including mortars, artillery and tanks are reportedly extensively used – running counter to the Minsk Accords.

According to a read-out of the Secretary-General’s phone call with Mr. Poroshenko, Mr. Ban underscored the UN’s support to and solidarity with the people of Ukraine at this difficult time and committed to continuing the Organization’s overall engagement in Ukraine.
Wanted: Young entrepreneur to address UN General Assembly session on climate change

21 April - Are you or do you know a young person from a developing country with an inspiring story about climate action? If so, the United Nations wants to hear from you.

A global search is underway for a young entrepreneur from a developing country to address a special United Nations High-Level Event on Climate Change, set for 29 June, and convened by the President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa.

The event, which will be attended by Ministers, business leaders and representatives from civil society organizations will take place just months before countries meet in Paris in December 2015 to adopt a new universal agreement on climate change.

“The first goal is to check the pulse of Members States to see where we stand. But we also know the world needs to go further to tackle climate change. We are therefore looking for solutions and inspiration from a young person who is already successfully taking climate action in his or her community,” said Mr. Kutesa.

The search for a dynamic young speaker to address the opening ceremony is being conducted by the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS). In addition, UN-NGLS asks for candidates to participate in two other panels during the day of the meeting.

UN-NGLS is asking candidates who are representatives of civil society organizations to share their story of successful local climate action to help shift the world to a sustainable path, enabling economic opportunity, equality, and a healthy environment for all. Civil society representatives may also apply to serve on the Selection Committee for this event. To apply, please visit: http://bit.ly/Apply-29June-UNPGA-climate-change.

The event will be the highpoint of a week of climate change activities at UN Headquarters in New York, which kick off on 23 June with a meeting of business leaders organized by UN Global Compact. This will be followed on 26 June by a two-day meeting of Ministers from the least developed countries (LDCs). The events will culminate in a concert by leading World Music stars and the New York Symphony Orchestra on 30 June. The events will all take place under the banner of the UN campaign “2015: Time for Global Action.”

“This year is both historic and momentous,” Mr. Kutesa said. “We are engaged in three critically important processes – the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, financing for development, and climate change. This year, 2015, is the time for global action and this High-Level Event should highlight and inspire governments, communities and civil society to take further action.”

UN rights experts welcome Pakistan Supreme Court decision to suspend death penalty

21 April - A group of United Nations independent experts today welcomed a recent decision made by the Supreme Court of Pakistan to suspend death sentences imposed by military courts.

In a statement released today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the experts said they had previously expressed concern at an earlier decision by Pakistan to rescind its unofficial six-year moratorium on the death penalty for non-military personnel in terrorism-related cases.

“Terrorism attacks should not prevent States from complying with the stringent requirements of international law for the
imposition of the death penalty,” the independent experts noted.

International law requires that the death penalty may be imposed only in the context of a stringent functioning of the law and order system, so as to ensure the highest respect of due process and fair trial guarantees for the defendants.

“Only full respect of these guarantees distinguishes capital punishment as possibly permitted under international law from an arbitrary execution,” the experts stressed. “The administration of justice through military tribunals raises serious questions, particularly in terms of access to justice, independence and impartiality of the court, and respect for the fair trial rights of the accused.”

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

Among the experts, who work on an individual, voluntary, unpaid basis and are not UN staff, were the Special Rapporteurs on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; and on the independence of judges and lawyers. The Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on arbitrary detention and the Chair of the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearance were also part of the team.

They said that using military tribunals to try civilians in the name of national security, a state of emergency or counter-terrorism, runs against all relevant international and regional human rights standards and established case law.

“Military tribunals should have jurisdiction only over military personnel who commit military offences or breaches of military discipline,” they said. “And then only when those offences or breaches do not amount to serious human rights violations, and they should never have the power to impose the death penalty.”

They stressed that they had repeatedly called on States to assess whether the use of the death penalty is compatible with the right to life, as well as the inherent dignity of the human person, and to consider if the severe mental and physical pain or suffering it causes could constitute a violation of the absolute prohibition of torture.

“We hope that the decision of the Supreme Court will provide an opportunity for all relevant actors in Pakistan to pursue a critically important dialogue aiming to address the questions relating to the legality of military tribunals, and the use of the death penalty, in line with Pakistan’s international human rights obligations,” the experts said, stressing that ensuring a safe environment for judges, prosecutors, lawyers and other members of the justice system is of fundamental importance.

**At Security Council, UN chief urges return to two-State negotiations for Israel and Palestine**

21 April - The prospects of a two-State solution in the Middle East are getting dimmer with potentially explosive consequences for the entire region, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned today as he urged the international community to boost efforts at bringing both Israeli and Palestinian delegations back to the negotiating table.

“Over the years, we have seen determined efforts to achieve a comprehensive, negotiated peace based on a two-State solution,” the Secretary-General said this morning as he briefed a Security Council on the situation in the Middle East at a meeting chaired by Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh of Jordan, which holds the Council’s presidency for the month.

“Instead of peace, however, there have been decades of missed opportunities and failures that have come at an enormous cost.”

The Council meeting comes on the heels of Israel’s most recent election and the impending formation of a new Israeli Government but also a flare-up in tensions between the Government in Tel Aviv and the Palestinian Authority.
For over four months, the Israeli Government withheld over $470 million in Palestinian tax revenues, undermining the stability of Palestinian institutions and their ability to pay public sector salaries and provide needed services.

As of last Saturday, however, the UN confirmed that both sides had reached an agreement on the release of the tax revenues – a move in line with the Paris Protocol of the Oslo Accords.

The Secretary-General welcomed the agreement as a reversal of what was otherwise a “counterproductive” policy which, he said, “seriously undermines the ability of the Government of Palestine to carry out its responsibilities.”

The UN chief also urged the incoming Israeli Government to reaffirm Israel’s commitment to the two-state solution and to take credible steps to foster an environment conducive to a return to meaningful negotiations.

Despite some progress, however, Mr. Ban also voiced concern about the “fragile security situation, the lack of progress on intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the pace of reconstruction” in the Gaza enclave.

“Gaza is facing a crushing financial crisis,” he continued. “Public sector employees remain unpaid. The impact of the conflict and of extreme poverty on Palestinians in Gaza has been severe.”

As he urged international donors to support a second humanitarian payment to Palestinian civil servants in Gaza, the Secretary-General also drew attention to the UN-backed Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism – a “critical tool” aimed at alleviating the suffering of Gaza’s people and rebuilding the territory following last summer’s 51-day conflict between Israel and Gaza-based militants.

To date, he added, the Mechanism had enabled some 70 per cent of households in need of shelter repairs to procure the necessary materials which would otherwise be curtailed due to the enclave’s stringent blockade. Additionally, 60 of the 130 projects funded by the international community and the private sector had been approved by Israel and six were currently underway.

“These are promising developments, yet the needs remain enormous,” cautioned Mr. Ban. “Despite the generosity of some donors, critical funding gaps threaten stability.”

Humanitarian agencies, he explained, are struggling to raise the $720 million needed for temporary shelters for Gaza’s 100,000 internally displaced people and the World Food Programme’s (WFP) food assistance campaign targeting 95,000 Palestinians remains at risk of suspension.

Against that backdrop, the Secretary-General described a situation of simmering tensions in the West Bank amid continuing clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians and the destruction of Palestinian-owned structures.

Such realities feed the frustration and tension in a vicious cycle that undermines the path to peace, he declared.

“The international community must do more to promote a return to negotiations that will end nearly half a century of occupation and allow two States, Israel and Palestine, to live side by side in security in peace,” Mr. Ban concluded.

“Both sides face difficult choices. But one choice stands above all: whether to choose peace or the death, destruction and suffering that has defined the conflict for far too long.”