In the headlines:

- ‘Endless cycle of suffering’ must stop, Ban says in Ramallah, urging end to wave of violence in region
- Yemen: 3.3 million people in need of critical aid in besieged Taiz, warns UN health agency
- Hardliners will not ‘hijack’ Libyan political process, declares UN envoy, vowing to press ahead
- UN agency and European Union kick-off pledging conference to support return of Somali refugees
- Ban welcomes Korean family reunions, looks forward to more dialogue, exchanges
- UNICEF applauds call from religious groups in Myanmar seeking tolerance for sake of country’s children
- UN human rights chief urges recognition of ‘dignity and worth of every human being’
- Humanitarian situation in Iraq ‘deteriorating and growing more complex,’ UN relief wing reports

‘Endless cycle of suffering’ must stop, Ban says in Ramallah, urging end to wave of violence in region

21 October - On the second day of his visit to Israel and Palestine to ease the current tensions in the region, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for an immediate end to violence, which “will only push back the day…both sides will live in peace and security,” and pledged the support of the United Nations to all efforts to create the conditions to make meaningful negotiations possible.

“I have been dismayed – as we all should be – by young people taking up weapons and seeking to kill. Violence is not the way,” declared Mr. Ban in Ramallah at a joint press conference with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

“Violence will not bring a just and lasting peace, but will only push back the day when Palestinians will achieve statehood and both sides will live in peace and security,” the Secretary-General continued, offered his condolences to the families suffering from the violence and welcomed and encouraged the efforts of President Abbas to lower tensions and end hostilities.

“I understand the frustration that comes after years of dashed hopes. But the only way to end the violence is through real and visible progress towards a political solution, including an end to the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state living in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours,” the UN chief stressed.

He urged the international community to uphold its long-stated commitment to a comprehensive peace settlement but insisted that ultimately, “it is for Palestinians and Israelis to choose peace.”

“Our most urgent challenge is to stop the current wave of violence and avoid any further loss of life. I am deeply concerned by repeated provocations at the holy sites in Jerusalem, which have fuelled the current outbreak of violence. Addressing the existing tensions is critical to reversing the trend towards escalation,” he added.

The Secretary-General visited Israel yesterday and met with President Rueben Rivlin and Prime Minister Benjamin
Netanyahu.

Mr. Ban had informed that he emphasized to Prime Minister Netanyahu the urgent need to ease tensions and underscored today that the response of Israel to the situation added to the already difficult challenge of restoring calm.

However, Mr. Ban said that he welcomed the Israeli leaders’ repeated assurances that Israel has no intention of changing the historic status quo at the holy sites and stressed that perceptions can only change through actions on the ground.

Further, the UN chief also called for renewed attention of the situation in West Bank and stated that the Israeli settlement activity is “illegal and only inflames tensions.”

He stressed to both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to refrain from taking unilateral steps which “diminish the prospects for peace” and to work towards building “the foundations of a two-state solution.”

“We cannot ignore the sense of desperation that comes with the slow evaporation of hope. We must stop the endless, needless, mindless cycle of suffering, and begin the hard work necessary to restore the belief that genuine progress towards peace is possible,” Mr. Ban declared.

“A failure to do so will only embolden the advocates of violence and division. I urge Palestinians and Israelis alike to show courage and find their way back to a meaningful peace process. I welcome renewed international political action, including by the Quartet,” he said.

Lastly, stressing that “time is not on the side of peace” and that immediate action must be taken to “prevent any further worsening of the already unsustainable status quo,” the Secretary-General reiterated that the United Nations will continue to fully support all efforts to achieve a negotiated two-state solution.

**Yemen: 3.3 million people in need of critical aid in besieged Taiz, warns UN health agency**

21 October - The top United Nations health official in Yemen is appealing for unrestricted access to Taiz, where “innocent lives are at risk” in the besieged highland city where more than 3.3 million people are in critical need of health assistance, safe drinking water, food and fuel.

“The situation in Taiz is alarming,” warned Dr. Ahmed Shadoul, the World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in Yemen.

“Hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians need life-saving medicines and health services, food, safe water and fuel,” Dr. Shadoul said. “Humanitarian and health needs are increasing and the limited response we have been able to provide is not enough.”

Despite efforts by WHO to provide medicines and medical supplies to Taiz governorate, sufficient for 600,000 beneficiaries, including 250,000 people inside Taiz City, shortages of fuel and medicines have forced most health units in villages to shut down.

“Patients with chronic diseases such as diabetes, kidney disease and cancer, are unable to access life-saving essential medicines and dialysis centres due to limited access of health facilities and reduced functionality of others,” according to WHO.

WHO also said that shortages in food have led to significant price hikes, with many people now unable to afford basic food items, resulting in increased risk of malnutrition, especially in children.

“The main wells providing safe drinking-water have shut down due to interruptions in power supply and lack of fuel for
generators,” the agency reported.

Through collaboration with health authorities in Taiz and its partners, WHO has been controlling a dengue fever outbreak in the governorate this year.

“There is so much more we can do for the people of Taiz, but we need unrestricted access so that we can reach more people, and additional funding to allow us to scale up our response,” said Dr. Shadoul.

“Unless we are able to overcome these two challenges, more innocent lives are at risk,” he said. “I call on all parties to the conflict to allow delivering aid into Taiz, and for the international donor community to support our work.”

He appealed for $60 million urgently needed for life-saving response operations across the country until the end of this year.

**Hardliners will not ‘hijack’ Libyan political process, declares UN envoy, vowing to press ahead**

**21 October** - The effort towards forming a unity government in Libya will continue, the United Nations envoy for the country said today, emphasizing that while a position had been announced that some parties had not voted for the UN-backed political agreement, “there is no chance for small groups or personalities to hijack this process.”

Speaking at a press conference in Tunis, UN Special Representative for Libya Bernardino León said that there had been a position on the agreement announced by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, which was then followed by “a statement signed by what seems to be a majority of the members insisting that there was no proper vote and that no proper decision [was] taken.”

“Unfortunately, all these groups or personalities that are opposing the political solution have not been able to put on the table any alternative,” he added, referring to the UN-backed political agreement, negotiated by Libyan parties, aimed at ending the crisis in the country.

The process is owned by Libya, not the UN, and the negotiations had included Libyans from all political and geographic regions, he explained, adding that “this is the most important asset this dialogue has.” The UN had facilitated the process but had not proposed names for the national unity government.

Mr. León also responded to criticisms that Benghazi was not being properly taken into account during the political process. He said that in his last Security Council report he had “insisted that we have to express awareness and solidarity with the people from Benghazi” but could not make decisions on the matter as it was up to those involved in the Libyan dialogue.

“So let’s leave the Libyans to answer this question, it will not be the international community or the United Nations that can impose this on the others,” he said. “The basis of our dialogue has been consensus and it will continue to be consensus.”

Mr. León also reiterated the support of the international community for the process.

“This Libyan proposal has been supported strongly by the international community and I think Libyans can be proud to have this support from all these international actors and I think this is a very important asset for this,” he said.

He also noted “the wave of support, the wave of requests to go on from what I believe is a strong majority of the Libyans” and said that “the process is going on, we will convene new meetings in the coming days to listen to proposals and ideas from the Libyans involved in the process and those outside the process to go on,” adding that “it is important that the Libyans see that we go on and that the proposals from this dialogue will prevail.”

After months of talks – the dialogue that began earlier this year in Geneva has travelled to Morocco, Algeria and Libya itself
dealing with different parties and tracks, including civil society representatives, political parties and political leaders – the United Nations assisted in drafted a proposed agreement to form a government of national and in early October, a six-member executive council was proposed to lead it.

**UN agency and European Union kick-off pledging conference to support return of Somali refugees**

21 October - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres today convened with the European Union a pledging conference to rally support for Somalia by creating conditions for the voluntary return of refugees to the east African nation faced with “one of the most complex crisis in recent history.”

“We need to invest in Somalia so that some of the refugees who are currently stranded in refugee camps can go home and participate in rebuilding their country,” Mr. Guterres said in a press statement ahead of the event, which took place in Brussels, Belgium.

“That would benefit not only Somalia and the Somali refugees, but the entire region.”

More than 2 million Somalis remain displaced in the region in a refugee situation that has been going on for 23 years, including some 1.1 million in their own country and 967,000 as refugees in the neighbouring countries. Somalis are among the top 10 nationalities of those who have been crossing the Mediterranean to Europe in 2015, according to the High Commissioner’s Office (UNHCR).

With Somali refugees making up one of the leading protracted refugee situations, delegates from more than over 40 countries and organizations are meeting in Brussels for a pledging conference organized by the UN refugee agency and the European Union and attended by Somali and Kenyan leaders.

They discussed how to concretely prepare for voluntary returns of Somali refugees from the region and enhance absorption capacity in areas of return in Somalia by strengthening humanitarian and development actions, as well as the security and resilience of refugees and host communities in Kenya.

The initial plan of action, which is aligned with the Somalia New Deal Compact framework, requires a total of $500 million and will run for two years until the end of 2017, according to the agency.

At the end of the day, UNHCR tweeted that the pledging conference raised $105 million.

“Around the world, sustainable voluntary return home is the solution which most refugees prefer for themselves and their families,” the top refugee official said. “Somalis are no exception.”

UNHCR and partners have helped some 5,300 refugees to voluntarily return to Somalia since December 2014; while a significant number have returned spontaneously, and the refugee agency is now getting ready to move into the enhanced phase of this operation, which will aim to assist 135,000 refugees to return to Somalia between January 2016 and December 2017.

The majority of Somali refugees (420,000) are living in Kenya, mostly in the five refugee camps in Dadaab in the north-east of the country. Nearly 250,000 Somali refugees are living in Ethiopia and a similar number in Yemen.

The UN official said he hoped that, “as the global refugee crisis has moved into the centre of the international community’s attention, states and development partners will take a holistic approach to the problem” by “addressing their continued needs for protection in the region and enhancing our efforts to support sustainable voluntary return.”
Ban welcomes Korean family reunions, looks forward to more dialogue, exchanges

21 October - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the holding of reunions of separated families of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK), and stressed that humanitarian measures such as this should be regularized and not subject to political security and considerations.

According to a statement issued by Mr. Ban's spokesperson in New York, the reunions are being held from 20 to 26 October at Mount Kumgang in DPRK.

“The Secretary-General is encouraged by the positive trends related to inter-Korean relations, particularly the 'August Agreement.' He hopes that the recent momentum will pave the way for greater inter-Korean dialogue, people-to-people contact, reconciliation and cooperation,” said the statement.

The Secretary-General also urged for more dialogue and exchanges between the two governments to 'contribute the promotion of human rights, peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula'.

UNICEF applauds call from religious groups in Myanmar seeking tolerance for sake of country’s children

21 October - In the light of upcoming elections in Myanmar and amid reports of rising religious intolerance, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today welcomed a joint statement by the leaders of four main religious groups in the country calling for tolerance and respect of religious freedom as essential conditions for every child to grow and develop to their full potential.

“Religious leaders play an important role in advocating for children’s rights and earn public trust among their respective faiths,” explained Bertrand Bainvel, UNICEF Representative to Myanmar, in a press statement.

According to UNICEF, the call comes after reports of endorsing religious divides have been attempted for political gains in the 2015 elections in Myanmar.

The statement was released by Interfaith for Children, an inter-faith group that has insisted on putting children’s needs and rights at the centre of the elections.

UNICEF also said that the joint declaration by Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim leaders of the country reminded the public and politicians that children represent around one third of the country’s population.

The religious heads urged the public and politicians to put children and harmony first and that the efforts made for them now ‘will have a marked effect on their future.’

“Much of Myanmar’s future depends on what the Myanmar society will be able to do for children now. The coming elections are the perfect moment not only to commit to new policies, goals and resources for children, but also to emphasise the values of peace and tolerance which are so essential to their harmonious development”, added Mr. Bainvel.

The UN agency also added that the religious groups have urged parents and guardians of any faith to bring peace, harmony, understanding and cooperation without discrimination towards any race, religion or culture.
UNICEF added that this is the first statement issued by Interfaith for Children since April 2014, when the religious leaders from four different faiths came together for the first time in Myanmar’s history in support of child protection, survival and education.

Lastly, the agency reaffirmed its support of the Interfaith for Children and Ratana Metta Organizations (RMO) and reiterated its commitment to the realisation of children’s rights and a tolerant society respectful of religious and ethnic diversity.

**UN human rights chief urges recognition of 'dignity and worth of every human being'**

21 October - The turmoil and crises the international community faces clearly demonstrate the disasters that may occur when human rights are “neglected and ground down,” the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said today in a wide-ranging address to UN Member States in New York.

Presenting his annual report to the UN General Assembly's Third Committee – the Organization's main body dealing with social, humanitarian and cultural issues – he said the document “lays bare the urgent need for better human rights protection, across every field of human endeavour.”

The world's current challenges would only be solved when States apply the binding human rights commitments to which they have agreed, he continued. “It is by insisting on the dignity and worth of every human being, and securing their rights, that our States, together, will thrive.”

High Commissioner Zeid said that in the report, his Office (OHCHR) had identified priority areas requiring urgent action from every State, had investigated abuses and “called for accountability across a vast range of complex situations.”

“In the past year, humanitarian crises and conflicts have generated the worst human displacement since World War II,” he explained. “We face a crisis of migration governance globally, and in several regions. More effective approaches, grounded in the human rights of the people concerned, are urgently needed.”

He also echoed the words of the Secretary-General, who said last week that “there are not two kinds of people: 'deserving' or 'undeserving' migrants.

“There are only members of our common human family who need protection, assistance and support,” said Mr. Zeid. “Refugees do have special rights under international law – but all migrants must have human rights protection.”

Turning his remarks to the 2030 Agenda, he said that OHCHR had contributed “significant input” to ensure that human rights, including the right to development, were integrated at its heart. He also noted that the implementation of the agenda should be monitored to secure accountability to citizens, and that monitoring should be backed by a human rights framework.

Mr. Zeid also noted that OHCHR has continued to monitor and investigate human rights violations, including an investigation team in Iraq, which was sent there to report on abuses committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other, associated groups.

It also, he continued, deployed a team to investigate violations committed in Libya, as well as to Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria, to collect information on human rights abuses committed by Boko Haram and violations perpetrated by State armed forces. He also referred to recent and upcoming OHCHR reports on human rights and related issues in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, South Sudan and Ukraine.

He also noted OHCHR's work with the UN Human Rights Council, which included a dialogue on migrants, as well as the establishment of new special procedures mandates on unilateral coercive measures, the rights of persons with albinism, and the right to privacy.
The High Commissioner then turned his remarks to the subject of organizational change within his Office, noting the opening of a new country office in Burundi as well as a “field-based structure” in Seoul, Republic of Korea. An agreement to open an office in Honduras had been made, offices in Kosovo and Togo were closed, and human rights adviser posts in Ecuador and Honduras had been discontinued.

He spotlighted the “organizational change initiative” for OHCHR that he had first announced in March of this year.

“It capitalizes on our role as the UN's leading reference point and advocate for human rights, and prioritises working directly and through partners to transform the recommendations of the human rights mechanisms into real changes on the ground,” he said, noting that the structural changes, which include eight regional hubs, will establish a better global presence and aid the Office's early warning and prevention capabilities.

**Humanitarian situation in Iraq ‘deteriorating and growing more complex,’ UN relief wing reports**

21 October - The humanitarian situation in Iraq is deteriorating and growing more complex, as conflict protracts, coping capacities diminish, and funding falls short, according to a report issued today by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The number of Iraqis requiring humanitarian assistance has grown to over 8.6 million people, including over 3.2 million people who have fled their homes since January 2014, according to OCHA. The International Organization for Migration’s most recent tracking of displacement shows that there are now 3,206,736 internally displaced people in Iraq, while military operations and insecurity have triggered new displacement in Salah al-Din and Anbar governorates.

Cholera has spread across the country, with over 1,600 confirmed cases and two deaths one month after the outbreak was first declared, according to the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO). The main causes for the current outbreak are broken water supply systems and the lack of sufficient chlorine in the country to provide clean water.

Insecurity and military operations continue, as Iraqi security forces and its allies continue military operations to retake areas from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Amidst unverified reports of an escalation of military operations there have been reports of civilians seeking to leave Ramadi and Falluja, but access to safety for civilians in conflict areas remains a concern, according to the OCHA report.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq reported that at least 537 Iraqi civilians were killed and 925 civilians injured nationwide in September 2015. This includes civilian police and casualty figures from Anbar.

International assistance has alleviated the suffering of over two million Iraqis during the past year, but funding is still short of growing needs, said OCHA. Overall global funding to Iraq in 2015 is $618 million, of which $237 million has been received outside the UN and its partners' joint appeals. On 4 June, the Government of Iraq and the UN launched a revised and prioritized Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan seeking $498 million, 41 per cent of which has currently been received.