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not an official record

Security Council strongly condemns terrorist attack in eastern Ukraine

22 January - The United Nations Security Council has condemned ‘in the strongest terms’ today’s shelling which resulted in the deaths of more than 10 civilians in eastern Ukraine amid intensifying clashes between Government and opposition forces.

According to reports, as many as 15 civilians were killed and more than 20 were injured when shelling hit a public transport stop in the eastern city of Donetsk.

In recent days, Donetsk has been the scene of bitter fighting as the two sides clashed over the city’s heavily contested airport.

“The members of the Security Council expressed their deep sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and wished a swift recovery to those injured,” the Council said in a press statement, adding that the Members underlined the need to conduct and objective investigation and bring the perpetrators of the ‘reprehensible act’ to justice.

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine transcended what was initially seen as an internal Ukrainian political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country, later reaching full-scale conflict in the east. Despite the Minsk cease-fire, the situation in Ukraine has since continuously deteriorated, with serious consequences for the country's unity, territorial integrity and stability.

From mid-April to 12 December, at least 4,707 people were killed and 10,322 wounded by fighting. Since the tenuous ceasefire began, at least 1,357 fatalities were recorded. Moreover, the UN has recently reported that since March 2014, more than one million people have been displaced from the conflict-affected areas, including nearly 530,000 people within
Ukraine, of who at least 130,000 are children.

In their press statement, the Council Members also underlined the need for the ‘full implementation’ if the Minsk protocol and welcomed yesterday’s joint statement issued by the foreign ministers of France, Germany, the Russian Federation and Ukraine amid attempts to broker a peace.

**DR Congo: Ban urges calm in Kinshasa; peacekeeping chief backs gradual drawdown of UN mission**

*22 January -* Amid the deteriorating situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where the capital, Kinshasa, is gripped by clashes between demonstrators and security forces, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon today urged maximum restraint on all sides, while the head of United Nations peacekeeping operations briefed the Security Council on broader efforts to help stabilize the vast country.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, the Secretary-General expressed his concern about the unrest in Kinshasa and other cities following the adoption of a draft electoral law by the National Assembly, currently under further review in the Senate.

“He deplores the loss of lives and injuries caused so far and calls on the national security forces and demonstrators to refrain from further violence and exercise maximum restraint,” said the statement.

Media reports note that violent anti-Government protests in the capital are entering their third day, and dozens of people have been killed as police forces and demonstrators face off in the streets.

In his statement, Mr. Ban underscored the Government's responsibility to provide political space for the peaceful expression of opinions. “Demonstrations should be conducted in a peaceful manner. While violence is not acceptable, the response to violent protests must also be proportionate,” he said.

“The Secretary-General calls on all key stakeholders to resume political dialogue and ensure that elections-related matters are discussed in an inclusive and peaceful fashion in the appropriate fora,” the statement continued, emphasizing the readiness of his Special Representative in the DRC, Martin Kobler, to use his good offices to help narrow the gap between the main actors involved.

Mr. Ban also reiterated the need for a credible, peaceful, and timely electoral process, in accordance with the Constitution.

Earlier in the day, Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations, also addressed the situation in Kinshasa, telling the Security Council that there had been recent days of ‘troubling incidents related to the electoral process.’ The Congolese people have the right to demonstrate peacefully, and ‘we urge the Government to ensure that any response to violent protests is proportionate,’ he added.

As for the main focus of his presentation to the Council, he said that while the DRC has come a long way, the mission to neutralize armed forces is not yet over, and neither the UN nor the Government can accomplish that alone.

Briefing the 15-member body on the Strategic Review of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), Mr. Ladsous said a wide range of issues had been discussed, including the political situation, the upcoming elections and security challenges. There was agreement that much has been achieved over the past years: the withdrawal of foreign armed forces, the reunification of the country, the establishment of the Transitional Government and two national elections.

However, major challenges remain including the M23, Congolese and foreign armed groups, in particular the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which continue to pose a threat to the civilian population and the overall stability and development of the eastern DRC and the Great Lakes Region.
It was agreed that MONUSCO continues to stabilize the situation in the DRC, while supporting the Government in neutralizing armed groups. But there was also criticism over how the Mission is implementing certain aspects of its mandate and the performance of some of its contingents.

“We have taken these concerns seriously and the report before you contains a number of recommendations for MONUSCO to become more effective in implementing its mandate and to achieve more tangible results. This includes a recommendation by the Secretary-General for MONUSCO to intensify dialogue with the Government on a number of key policy issues,” said Mr. Ladsous.

With regard to the military component, he said he had conveyed concerns to troop and police contributing countries during a meeting two days ago. The message was clear: transformation of the MONUSCO Force alone will not result in the changes necessary to more effectively implement the Mission’s mandate.

“It must involve a change in behaviour of troop-contributing countries. All contingents must be ready and willing to use armed force against those who pose a threat to the civilian population and to do so proactively. It is clear, at the same time, that the protection of civilians cannot be reduced to military action only,” the Under-Secretary-General said.

The Secretary-General has recommended a reduction of the MONUSCO military personnel by 2,000 troops –based on the relative improvement in the security situation in some parts of eastern DRC following the military defeat of the M23, some increase in the capacity of the FARDC (national forces) to address the threat posed by armed groups, and a number of concrete measures to make the Force more mobile and flexible.

Congolese President Joseph Kabila and his Government, however, had advocated for deeper cuts. “They expressed the view that maintaining the numbers we have proposed would send a negative signal…Considering the numerous political and security challenges that remain, any reduction beyond the recommended figure would have negative implications on the ability of the Force to implement its mandate,” Mr. Ladsous warned.

The protection of civilians remains MONUSCO’s core mandated task, expressing concern over recent violent protests and urged the Government to ensure that any response to violent protests is proportionate. Protecting civilians requires a strong military component, able to flexibly and effectively undertake the military aspects of a comprehensive protection of civilians strategy, until the Government forces have the capacity to take over tasks MONUSCO is currently performing.

MONUSCO also has the mandate to neutralize armed groups. ‘Adequate capacity’ and ‘specialized capabilities’ are essential to implement this unique mandate in particular in view of operations against the FDLR and ADF.

He said that achieving tangible results will require resources and time, considering the dispersed nature of the armed group and its immersion within the local population, while avoiding the repetition of devastating humanitarian consequences that followed FARDC military operations against the FDLR in 2009.

This, however, does not mean that MONUSCO should stay in the DRC forever, Mr. Ladsous said, adding that MONUSCO’s exit will essentially depend on the Government’s commitment and ability to make progress on neutralizing armed groups; building the capacity of the army and the police in a sustainable manner and holding credible elections.

“We all have made considerable investments in the DRC over the past 15 years and it is in our collective interest to ensure a gradual withdrawal without reversing the hard-won gains achieved thus far. Neither the United Nations nor the Government can do this in isolation,” he said.

Speaking to reporters after closed door consultations with Council members, Mr. Kobler, who also heads up MONUSCO, said he held a weekend meeting with President Kabila and the two had discussed joint Government-UN operations against armed groups, in line with the calls made last week by the Security Council and the Secretary-General for the Government to approve such actions.

As for MONUSCO’s preparations for such operations against armed groups, including the FDLR, Mr. Kobler said: “We are done. We are ready to go. Our troops are pre-deployed and this is the case with the FARDC. We want to act jointly, because
we cannot hold the areas we need to hold [on our own].”

He said President Kabila assured him that joint operations would start ‘very soon,’ said Mr. Kobler, but he added that the UN has set up 18 temporary assembly areas for those armed combatants that want to pursue the UN-backed disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process and repatriate to Rwanda.

“Surrender. Disarm voluntarily, any day, any time, and we are ready to accept them and Rwanda is ready to receive them.”

UN Libya Mission condemns attack against Central Bank in Benghazi

22 January - The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) today condemned the reported armed attack against the country’s Central Bank branch in the eastern city of Benghazi.

The Mission also called for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry to investigate the situation, a UN spokesperson told the press at a Headquarters briefing this afternoon.

“UNSMIL says that the incident and the latest ceasefire breaches stress the importance of moving ahead urgently with the dialogue process, which remains the best solution to Libya’s deteriorating political and security situation,” said Mr. Farhan Haq.

It calls on all parties to do more to make sure that the truce, which the parties unilaterally agreed to last week, is fully respected in order to create a conducive environment for the dialogue.

The ceasefire was announced last week after a first round of intensive talks, hosted by UNSMIL in Geneva, during which participants agreed upon an agenda for discussions going forward, with the aim of reaching a political agreement to form a consensual national unity government, and making security arrangements necessary to end fighting and ensure the withdrawal of armed groups from Libyan cities.

As well as discussing confidence-building measures to safeguard Libya’s national unity and to alleviate the population’s suffering, participants also agreed to hold another round of talks in Geneva next week and strongly urged all relevant Libyan stakeholders to attend.

INTERVIEW: all parties want calm across Israeli-Lebanese border, says former UN envoy

22 January - While there are still outstanding issues and underlying tensions, all parties want to maintain calm across the so-called ‘Blue Line’ that separates Israel and Lebanon, according to a former United Nations official tasked with monitoring the issue.

Derek Plumbly, a former British diplomat with extensive Middle East experience, recently completed a three-year stint as the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon. Among his most important responsibilities at the helm of the Beirut-based UN political office in Lebanon (UNSCOIL) was helping to implement Security Council resolution 1701.

The resolution, which ended the 2006 war between Israel and the Lebanese group Hizbollah, calls for respect for the Blue Line, the disarming of all militias in Lebanon, and an end to arms smuggling in the area. While UN peacekeepers patrol the south, UNSC0L’s small civilian team pursues the political dimensions of the resolution.

“Although we failed to secure progress on some of the more difficult outstanding issues, and there are unimplemented parts
of the resolution, the calm has enabled the people in the south of Lebanon and on the other side of the Blue Line to pursue their normal lives,” said Mr. Plumbly.

“Obviously there are reasons for concern, partly because there are these outstanding issues and because there are still underlying tensions,” he added in an interview this week with Politically Speaking, the online magazine of the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA).

“But I think there is a shared concern, frankly and it is very important to note this, on the part of all parties to sustain that calm across the Blue Line.”

Mr. Plumbly, who was succeeded by Sigrid Kaag of the Netherlands, noted that it is part of the Special Coordinator’s role to try to ‘underline the benefits’ of the calm and to ensure that people remain committed to a secession of hostilities across the Blue Line and to maintaining the achievements of resolution 1701.

Among the greatest challenges UNSCOL has faced, he said, has been coping with the consequences of the ongoing conflict in neighbouring Syria. Lebanon’s Government has declared an official policy of ‘disassociation’ from the Syrian conflict. And under an agreement brokered in 2012 known as the Baabda Declaration, the leading political blocs have adopted the same commitment not to import the crisis into Lebanon.

However, Lebanon has felt the impact of the conflict in many ways. “In the shadow of the Syrian crisis, the threats to Lebanon have become more numerous,” said Mr. Plumbly, citing spill-over in the form of terrorism, polarization of the population due to differing views on what is happening in Syria, as well as the large refugee influx.

There are currently some 1.1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon (equal to a quarter of the resident population), making it the country with the highest per capita concentration of refugees worldwide, and putting increasing pressure on a host community that is already stretched to the breaking point.

While the influx of a million refugees would be massive in any country, the UN refugee agency says that for Lebanon – ‘a small nation beset by internal difficulties’ – the impact is ‘staggering.’

Government formation and vacancies in top leadership posts have been recurring problems for the country, which has been without a president since last May.

Mr. Plumbly stressed the need for all parties to be flexible and to show a sense of urgency, adding that the vacancy in the presidency does have a negative impact.

“It’s a complex political situation with a lot of quite difficult challenges,” he stated, adding that this is why it is critical for the Special Coordinator to reach out to everyone and maintain contacts with all parties.

“There were no political players in Lebanon to whom we did not speak and that too on a very regular basis. And that, I think, is crucial.”
Somalia: UN, international partners call for resolution of political crisis

22 January - The United Nations and its international partners today voiced concern over delays in the resolution of Somalia’s long-standing political crisis and in the implementation of a stability-building mechanism as they called on the Horn of Africa nation’s President, Prime Minister and Federal Parliament ‘to unite for the greater good of the country.’

In a joint statement issued by the UN, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), European Union, African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the United States and United Kingdom, the partners urged the country to ‘move swiftly’ towards the implementation of ‘Vision 2006’ through a new Cabinet endorsed by Parliament, warning that further delays ‘could jeopardize the progress Somalia has made towards building peace and security.’

“September 2016 remains the constitutional deadline for conducting free and fair elections,” they declared. “All Somali institutions must focus on building consensus and act in the national interest.”

The statement comes as Somalia struggles to emerge from a political crisis ignited when a recent parliamentary vote of ‘no confidence’ resulted in the political ouster of Somalia’s former Prime Minister.

The Somali Parliament dismissed Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed on 6 December due to reported disputes between Mr. Ahmed and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud over political appointments. Since then, the Parliament has confirmed Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke as the country’s new Prime Minister but political uncertainty still remains.

In addition, the country has been plagued by political infighting and bursts of extremist violence as the terrorist group, Al-Shabaab, continues to wage an insurgency. Just last month, in the city of Baidoa, a terrorist attack left at least 15 people dead with many more wounded.

Against that backdrop, Raisedon Zenenga, the UN’s newly appointed Deputy Special Representative arrived today in Mogadishu, Somalia’s capital, to assume his duties with UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

“I am very pleased to have this opportunity to return to Somalia and support the aspirations of the people of Somalia for a peaceful, stable and prosperous future,” Mr. Zenenga said in a press release, adding that over the coming days he looked forward to meeting with officials from the Government as well as AMISOM and IGAD.

As part of UNSOM’s mandate, Mr. Zenenga will work in support of Somalia’s political priorities, human rights, rule of law and security institutions.

“The challenges are tremendous,” he concluded, “but we must work together to push forward the progress that the Somali people want to see.”
UN has ‘duty to speak out’ against anti-Semitism, Ban tells General Assembly

22 January - During an informal meeting of the General Assembly this morning to address concerns of a rise in anti-Semitic violence worldwide, top United Nations officials echoed the view of keynote speaker Bernard-Henri Lévy who lamented the ‘renewed advance of this radical inhumanity.’

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addressed the meeting via video message, expressing solidarity in the worldwide fight against anti-Semitism and noting that Jews have experienced “insidious bias” and “overt violence” throughout the course of history.

“The systematic murder of millions of European Jews in the Holocaust showed anti-Semitism at its most monstrous,” said Mr. Ban. “A United Nations that wants to be true to its founding aims and ideals has a duty to speak out against anti-Semitism.”

Noting that extremism is on the rise worldwide, he said responses to it had to avoid perpetuating cycles of demonization and playing into the hands of those who seek to divide. One particular trap related to the Middle East conflict.

“Grievances about Israeli actions must never be used as an excuse to attack Jews,” he said. “In the same vein, criticisms of Israeli actions should not be summarily dismissed as anti-Semitism.”

Alvaro Mendonca e Moura, Acting President of the General Assembly, looked ahead to the International Day of Commemoration of the Victims of the Holocaust next week, underlining not only the need to remember the tragedies but to learn from the ‘unspeakable atrocities’ committed. The international community also had an obligation to prevent acts of intolerance and hate from happening again.

Anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance and prejudice were on the rise despite the prohibition of religious and racial discrimination enshrined in many of the international community’s most important foundational documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“As we witness the shadow of intolerance permeating so many segments of public and private life, it is of utmost importance that all stakeholders be actively involved in our efforts to fight against prejudice, while also promoting and strengthening tolerance, mutual understanding, dialogue and respect,” said Mr. Mendonca e Moura.

Many tools were available to do so, he said, underlining the importance of education and pointing out that he would convene a high-level thematic debate on 6 April, on ‘Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation.’

Keynote speaker, Bernard-Henri Lévy said the General Assembly was given the ‘sacred task’ of preventing the spirits of anti-Semitism from awakening. They had awoken, though, he said, and that was why this meeting was taking place.

He sought to refute modern analysis of anti-Semitism, including the idea that it was just variety of racism, saying that looking the evil ‘squarely in the face’ required better understanding and the abandonment of old clichés about anti-Semitism and how it operates.

Today, he said, anti-Semitism stemmed from an ‘anti-Zionist delirium’ in those opposing the re-establishment of Jews in their historic homeland, from Holocaust denial and from the perceived use by Jews of the memory of their suffering to ‘overshadow’ other martyrs.
“Anti-Semitism needs those three formulations, which are like the three vital components of a moral atomic bomb,” Mr. Lévy said. “Each alone would be enough to discredit a people but when the three are combined, we can be pretty sure of facing an explosion in which all Jews everywhere in the world will be the designated targets.”

**UN lauds Mali for stemming Ebola epidemic, flags need to boost cross-border surveillance**

22 January - The United Nations today commended Mali for stemming the Ebola outbreak and urged the West African nation to remain vigilant as neighbouring countries continue to report new cases as part of the epidemic that has recorded nearly 22,000 cases and more than 8,600 deaths to date.

Mali was declared Ebola-free earlier this week after a period of 42 days without a new case.

“We came with a message of congratulations. We came to say bravo, but remain vigilant,” the head the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency response (UNMEER) Ould Cheikh Ahmed, told Malian Prime Minister Modibo Keita in the Malian capital of Bamako today.

The head of the UN response mission, accompanied by Dr. Bruce Aylward, Assistant Director-General of the UN World Health Organizations (WHO), also emphasized the need to strengthen cross-border surveillance as part of the fight against the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

“People, communities do not recognize the border, and therefore the next challenge for Mali – as indeed for Senegal and Nigeria, was also managed to isolate the few cases that came – is to remain vigilant,” Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed said. “We are not immune to new cases here and there, until we have zero cases throughout West Africa.”

UNMEER and WHO continued to support local authorities prepare for a cross-border meeting planned to take place in Lofa County in Liberia next week to improve border surveillance strategies and strengthen cross-border notification. Local authorities will participate, including those in the districts bordering Guinea and Sierra Leone.

WHO has recommended ‘robust’ exit screening in the three affected countries, which it said is ‘critical for minimizing the risk of exportation of Ebola cases.’

Surveillance and information sharing will be increased in the border districts of Guinea-Bissau, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal adjacent to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, according to WHO.

The United Nations yesterday appealed for $1 billion needed for the first six months of 2015 to sustain the momentum to stamp out Ebola in the region where the epidemic has started to turn in all three of the worst-hit countries.

In the latest statistics issued today, WHO reported 21,759 Ebola cases 8,668 deaths.

Meanwhile in Sierra Leone, two successive emergency response campaigns to distribute anti-malarial drugs to people living in areas affected by the Ebola virus disease outbreak have successfully reached more than 2.5 million people, and significantly reduced the number of people with fever that might be mistaken for Ebola, according to the UN health agency.

During the West African Ebola outbreak, people infected with malaria have been afraid to go to health centres for treatment or have been unable to receive treatment because some centres were closed. To reduce malaria transmission and related deaths, WHO has recommended a mass drug administration of anti-malarial medicines to all eligible people in Ebola hotspot areas.

In other news, following the reopening of schools in Guinea, attendance remained low in the first week, according to the UN mission. The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and its partners continue to monitor schools to ensure measures put in place for the safe return to school are being adhered to around the country.
Ban nominates experts to review peacebuilding architecture

22 January - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today nominated an Advisory Group of Experts to conduct a policy and institutional review of the peacebuilding architecture and then to develop recommendations based on this work.

Mr. Ban today announced the nomination of the following seven experts Mr. Anis Bajwa (Pakistan); Saraswathi Menon (India); Ms. Funmi Olonisakin (Nigeria); Mr. Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah (Mauritania); Mr. Charles Petrie (France); Mr. Gert Rosenthal (Guatemala); and Ms. Edith Grace Ssempala (Uganda).

On 15 December, the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council asked the Secretary-General to nominate up to seven experts to form an Advisory Group on the review of the peacebuilding architecture.

In accordance with the Terms of Reference endorsed by both the General Assembly and the Security Council, the Advisory Group of Experts will undertake country studies in Burundi, Central African Republic, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Timor-Leste.

The Advisory Group of Experts is expected to submit a report to the General Assembly and the Security Council for consideration through an intergovernmental process managed by co-facilitators appointed by the two principal organs. The intergovernmental process should be concluded with a concurrent decision by both organs before the end of 2015.

UN Messenger of Peace honoured for anti-hunger efforts

22 January - UN Messenger of Peace recognized for work to United Nations Messenger of Peace Princess Haya Al Hussein, of Jordan, was today awarded the 2015 Hunger Hero Award by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) during a ceremony at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, who arrived in Davos this morning, presented the award. A former WFP Ambassador Against Hunger, Princess Haya was honoured for her works to address hunger during a special event and panel discussion on Empowered Women and Innovation, hosted by the WFP, on the margins of the Forum.

In his remarks at the ceremony, Mr. Ban said Princess Haya's work epitomizes the spirit of partnership the world needs. “[She] shines a bright spotlight on the Millennium Development Goals, especially our hunger target,” he said, noting that she had supported United Nations operations in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Gaza and different parts of Africa and raised money and awareness, travelling to Africa, Asia, Europe and the United States to act and advocate.

Her Royal Highness created the first Middle Eastern food assistance nongovernmental organization (NGO), Tikiyet Um Ali (TUA), in her native Jordan, which ensures that any Jordanian family unable to pay for food receives a generous monthly ration. Even with the influx of refugees from Syria and Iraq putting extra pressure on Jordanian resources, the number of recipients had tripled in recent years. The Organization also played a prominent role in feeding Gazan families during the conflict in 2014.

At the global level, Princess Haya chairs the International Humanitarian City (IHC) in Dubai, the largest logistics centre for aid distribution, which is used by the WFP along with eight other United Nations agencies and dozens of NGOs, and, as a WFP ambassador, she visited WFP operations in many countries, including Malawi, Syria and Cambodia.
“Princess Haya’s steadfast support for our expanded capacity and operations out of Dubai as well as her advocacy for the people we serve throughout the world are greatly appreciated,” said WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin ahead of the award ceremony. “She is a true champion of WFP’s mission, and I look forward to continuing our work together in the future.”

In her role as a UN Messenger of Peace, Princess Haya has worked hard to raise attention for the Millennium Development Goals, especially with regard to hunger. She supported UN operations in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Gaza and sub-Saharan Africa through numerous field visits, fundraising and publicity.

Central African Republic: Security Council renews sanctions amid ‘continuous cycle’ of violence

22 January - Strongly condemning the resurgence of deadly violence across the Central African Republic (CAR), the United Nations Security Council today reinvigorated its sanctions against those individuals implicated in the country’s ongoing sectarian tensions which have pushed it to the brink of all-out conflict.

In today’s unanimously adopted resolution, the 15-member Council expressed ‘grave concern’ at the continuing destabilization of the CAR by armed groups, warning that the situation poses ‘a permanent threat to the peace, security and stability of the country’ while also constituting a threat to international peace and security in the region.

The Council renewed a series of sanctions targeting all individuals involved in undermining ‘the peace, stability and security of the CAR,’ calling on all Member States to maintain a series of measures, including an arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze which would continue until 29 January 2016.

More than two years of civil war and sectarian violence have displaced thousands of people in the CAR amid continuing clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka alliance and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian.

Among the severe concerns afflicting the country, noted the Council, is the ‘continuous cycle of provocations and reprisals by armed groups,’ repeated human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, sexual violence, and the denial of humanitarian access to the thousands of people affected by the worsening security conditions.

According to UN estimates, nearly 440,000 people remain displaced inside the country while some 190,000 have sought asylum across the borders. At the same time, more than 36,000 people – including the Peuhl ethnic group – remain trapped in enclaves across the country, hoping to find asylum in neighbouring States.

On that note, the Council Members stressed the ‘urgent and imperative’ need to end impunity in the CAR and reiterated the need for all perpetrators of violent acts to be held accountable, noting that some acts “may amount to crimes” under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Yesterday at UN Headquarters in New York, the Council mandated team of investigators warned that war crimes are being committed in the CAR and called for the establishment of a ‘truly international’ tribunal with international judges who could objectively investigate and prosecute perpetrators of such crimes in the war torn country.

On Monday, UN ‘blue helmets’ captured Rodrigue Ngaibona, leader of the anti-Balaka militia, in the Organization’s first high-profile arrest of 2015.

Since September 2014, the UN integrated stabilization Mission, known by its French acronym, MINUSCA, has arrested over 200 individuals in its support to the CAR authorities to maintain rule of law.

Nonetheless, the situation in the country remains tenuous, with Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations,
Hervé Ladsous, recently warning that the atmosphere in the Central African Republic was potentially explosive.

Private sector, ‘care economy’ will be key engines of job creation for next 5 years – UN report

22 January - Private sector services, such as business and administrative services, and real estate, as well as related industries, will employ more than a third of the global workforce over the next five years, according to new data released by the United Nations labour agency.

“Service sector employment will remain the most dynamic with respect to job creation in the next five years,” said Raymond Torres, a head researcher of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in a statement released today.

The ILO’s Economic and Social Outlook, released earlier this week, found that public services in health care, education and administration will also continue to be a major source of employment. While increasing at a slower pace than the private sector, they will still represent 15 per cent of total employment.

Industrial employment is expected to stabilize globally at slightly below 22 per cent because the pace of job creation in the construction sector is estimated to decline in comparison to the period 2010-2013. Meanwhile, employment levels in manufacturing will remain largely unchanged over the next 5 years and will account for only 12 per cent of all jobs in 2019.

The good news is that there is also growing demand for jobs that require face-to-face interaction, such as in health and personal services, signalling the emergence of a large care economy.

“These trends highlight the role of policies to help enterprises and workers seize the opportunities associated with new technology, while at the same time breaking barriers for moving up the economic and social ladder, especially for women,” said Mr. Torres.

But global trends show significant regional variations, with medium-skilled jobs disappearing in advanced economies at a faster pace than is the case in emerging and developing countries.

This polarization between higher and lower-skilled jobs is having a direct impact on labour incomes. The increase in jobs at both the lower and upper ends of the skills ladder, at the expense of those in the middle, has and will continue to contribute to widening income inequality.

The number of routine jobs, such as machine operator or assembler has decreased in many countries, raising concerns over the role of manufacturing in helping workers to escape poverty.

Without manufacturing jobs, opportunities for rural workers to improve their employment situation will be scarce. This shift of employment to services and a decline in manufacturing means a significant change in the skills demanded by the labour market.

“There will be a hollowing out of jobs needing medium levels of skill for routine tasks that can be automated,” said Mr. Torres.

People who once occupied these jobs will need to acquire new skills, or instead, face the prospect of competing for jobs at the lower end of the skill spectrum, he concluded.
'Resilience can become hallmark of 2015,' says UN disaster risk reduction chief

22 January - Ten years ago today, world leaders in Hyogo, Japan agreed on a framework to better manage risk and curb the impact of disasters in the wake of the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami – which claimed some 227,000 lives – and in March, they are set to meet for a United Nations conference in another Japanese city to take stock of whether the world has lived up to that promise.

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), the outcome of the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction, is the first plan to detail the work required from all different sectors and actors to reduce disaster losses. Looking to update that landmark agreement at a follow-up conference, global leaders in mid-March will head to Sendai, the centre of the Tōhoku region, which bore the brunt of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that led to the Fukushima meltdown.

“The evidence of the last decade – which has been marked by some of the worst natural disasters on record – is far from favourable,” says Margareta Wahlström, Head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) in an op-ed, published ahead of the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, for the Project Syndicate website.

To spotlight the need for action, she sets out a litany of tragic signposts that mark the road to Sendai: Port-au-Price collapsed in an earthquake. Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. Drought killed an unknown number of people in the Horn of Africa. Floods and earthquakes affected millions in Pakistan and China. Heat waves and wildfires ravaged countries around the world.

These incidents, she continues, are ‘stark reminders’ of the need for instruments like the HFA, especially because the drivers of risk – improper land use, non-existent or poorly implemented building codes, environmental degradation, poverty, climate change, and, most important, weak governance by inappropriate and insufficient institutions.

But there have been some important successes of the last decade, says Ms. Wahlström. “In Asia, where 80 per cent of the world's natural disasters are concentrated, the number of people directly affected has dropped, decade-by-decade, by almost one billion, owing to measures like the Indian Ocean early warning system.”

Timely evacuations in the face of accurately forecasted major storm systems have enabled the Philippines to save thousands of lives just in the last year. And over the last three years, China has worked hard to keep economic losses within its 1.5 per cent-of-GDP target.

Meanwhile, Turkey will have earthquake-proofed every school and hospital in the country by 2017, Ms. Wahlström continues, while adding that Ethiopia has developed a sophisticated data management system to help guide its efforts to address not only drought but also other natural hazards. Both countries – and many others – have incorporated the study of disaster risk into their school curriculums.

And the European Union has estimated that €1 ($1.18) spent on flood protection brings €6 in savings. She goes on to say that in the United Kingdom, investment in flood defences meant that 800,000 properties were protected during last winter's storms, significantly reducing the bill for response and recovery.

Nonetheless, noting that 2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the devastating Kobe earthquake, Ms. Wahlström points out that in the past 44 years, disasters caused by weather, climate, and water-related hazards have led to 3.5 million deaths, according to UNISDR. Even where people’s lives are saved, their livelihoods are often decimated. Since 1960, disasters have cost the world more than $3.5 trillion, which both developed and developing counties paying a huge price.

“That is why world leaders, through the HFA, need to agree to scale up efforts to cope with the risks posed by rising sea...
levels, global warming, rampant urbanization and rapid population growth,” she says, adding: “Only with strong political commitment at the highest level can real progress towards a safer, more sustainable future be made.”

With that in mind she says that it should not be difficult to win support for a revised HFA. “After all, there is no compelling – or even rational – reason which a finance minister or CEO would choose to pay for recovery but not invest in prevention.”

“If the UN conference produces the right agreement, resilience can become the hallmark of 2015, setting the tone for agreements later in the year on climate change and sustainable development – both of which hold important implications for disaster risk,” Ms. Wahlström concludes.

In an interview today with UN Radio, she said her message on this anniversary was quite simple: ‘unless we really respect and take disaster risk seriously, the cost to development and the damage it causes will continue to undermine the aspirations of people for economic and social development. The opportunity is now.’

Hence it’s important to integrate disaster risk reduction into education and build early warning systems so that when disasters happen, countries are better equipped. The most challenging area is addressing ‘underlining risk factors’ and how to mainstream disaster risk in urban planning, equality of infrastructure, and flood management. Another challenge is understanding risk, which Ms. Wahlström defined as a combination of factors that may trigger a disaster.

“A lot of focus must be made on local governments and the rest of society to make sure that they understand how to plan together with community groups and social groups, make sure that women and young people are involved,” she said.

Countries are now looking critically at these challenges and on how to work together on these areas with a lot of focus of infrastructure, especially in urban areas. It is a good sign that disaster risk is being discussed at other development negotiations in talks on climate change and the upcoming development agenda.

“Unless we get this issue up the political agenda alongside other critical areas like climate change and development it’s not really going to be able to make its full contribution to sustainability,” Ms. Wahlström concluded.

Also today, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a statement commemorating the 10 year anniversary of the HFA, credited the landmark document for having ‘laid down solid foundations’ for building resilience to disasters and saving thousands of people thanks to better early warning systems, improved weather forecasting and better education on risk and dangers posed by natural hazards.

“However, it is also clear that while we are doing a better job of managing disasters, we are less good at managing disaster risk. Society creates the disaster, not the hazard itself. Disaster risk is rising along with a failure to address the drivers of risk such as poverty, climate change, inequality, unsustainable land use and weak building codes,” said Mr. Ban.

He looked forward to these issues being addressed in the updated Hyogo Framework for Action, which will be adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai.

“2015 can be a turning point in human development if we agree on a path to resilience through strong agreements on disaster risk reduction, development financing, climate change and a new set of sustainable development goals,” said the Secretary-General.