Ahead of sustainability summit, ‘Global Goals’ will light up UN Secretariat building in New York

22 September - The United Nations Secretariat Building in New York will be illuminated this evening with massive projections relating to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ahead of the three-day special UN summit beginning on Friday.

“Starting at 7:30 p.m. until 10 p.m., we expect to illuminate the building with [images] relating to the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as images related to the 70th anniversary of the United Nations,” Under-Secretary-General for Public Information Cristina Gallach told reporters at a press conference, noting that filmmaker Richard Curtis produced the project.

The projections were developed in collaboration with the Global Goals campaign and 59 Productions. The filmed footage will be edited into a four-minute film to be shown at the Global Citizen Festival on 26 September and broadcast around the world as part of international coverage of the event.

The Global Goals campaign – funded by Mr. Curtis and launched at UN Headquarters earlier this month – aims to reach 7 billion people in seven days with news of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

“We think it’s going to be a moment to raise awareness, so the right thing to do just a few days before the summit,” she added.

More than 150 world leaders are expected at UN Headquarters to formally adopt at a three-day summit that begins Friday 25
September, an ambitious new sustainable development agenda. It will serve as the launch pad for action by the international community and by national governments to promote shared prosperity and well-being for all over the next 15 years.

Agreed by the 193 Member States of the UN, the new framework Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, consists of a Declaration, 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, a section on means of implementation and renewed global partnership, and a framework for review and follow-up.

Also speaking at the press conference was Amina J. Mohammed, Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, who described the agreement as “really meaningful.”

“It’s universal so it applies to everyone,’ she explained. “We will no longer have a North-South conversation about what the North is doing for the South, but what we are doing for each other. Clearly anything that happens anywhere in this world has that fallout in many other places – from the global financial crisis to conflict and migration, we feel it everywhere – to natural disasters and climate change.”

The agenda builds on the successful outcome of the Conference on Financing for Development that recently concluded in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and is expected to positively affect the negotiations on a new meaningful and universal climate agreement in Paris this December.

Its adoption on Friday will be preceded by an address to the General Assembly by Pope Francis. Shortly after he departs, a special video will be projected in the Hall.

Performances are also expected by international pop stars and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors Shakira and Angélique Kidjo. Malala Yousafzai will then share a message alongside 193 young people representatives from all UN Member States. The summit will then officially open.

Once the goals are adopted, Ms. Gallach said, every goal will be read out by a group of different people – female presidents, young children, celebrities and other individuals.

**Concerned by escalating violence in Burkina Faso, Ban urges respect for all citizens**

22 September - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is following with “great concern” the situation in Burkina Faso, and today called upon the country’s defence and security forces to avoid at all costs an escalation of violence and to ensure the respect for physical security and human rights of all Burkinabé citizens.

Mr. Ban also reiterated his call for “a swift resumption of the transition process to enable Burkina Faso’s return to constitutional order with the holding of presidential and legislative elections in accordance with the Constitution and the Transitional Charter,” Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric told reporters today during the regular briefing at UN Headquarters.

President Michel Kafando, Prime Minister Yacouba Isaac Zida and several Government ministers were detained last Wednesday and later released by elements of the Presidential Guard.

Meanwhile, as the Secretary-General follows the ongoing regional mediation efforts towards the resolution of the crisis, his Special Representative for West Africa, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, is coordinating with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union and other international partners to support and safeguard the transition in the country.
UNICEF and Goodwill Ambassador Shakira urge leaders to join early childhood revolution

22 September - The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and its Goodwill Ambassador and international pop star Shakira urged global leaders today to invest heavily in early childhood development in the wake of new science that is creating a revolutionary shift in understanding the lasting effects of deprivation and stress on the developing brains of young children.

“More than 100 million children are out of school and 159 million boys and girls under five are physically and cognitively stunted due to a lack of care and proper nutrition,” said Shakira, who joined Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake and the Director of the Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff at an event at UN Headquarters in New York.

“Every year that passes without us making significant investment in early childhood development and initiatives that address these issues, millions of kids will be born into the same cycle of poverty and lack of opportunity,” she added.

According to UNICEF, brain development is most intense during early childhood, with nearly 1,000 neural connections happening every second. These early synaptic connections form the basis of a child’s health and wellbeing, including the lifelong capacity to learn, adapt to change, and handle adversity.

Yet nearly one-third of all children under five years of age in lower- and middle-income countries are reportedly growing up in environments and situations that can interfere with this period of rapid growth and development.

Meanwhile, new scientific research shows that the developing brains of young children are as affected by environmental factors as they are by genetics. Inadequate nutrition, lack of stimulation, and toxic stress all can have a negative impact on brain development.

But it also shows that early, cost-effective interventions, such as encouraging breast feeding, or reading and playing with young children, as well as formal early education programmes, all support healthier brain development.

“What this new science is telling us is that literally, early experiences are kind of built into the body,” Dr. Shonkoff explained during a press conference on the issue. “They literally affect the development of the circuits of the brain, they affect the immune system’s development, they affect the development of the cardiovascular system, and so […] it’s a new opportunity to think about what we might do differently to protect children from the long-term consequences of that.”

UNICEF says these findings have significant implications for children growing up in extreme poverty, exposed to domestic violence, or in countries affected by conflict and other crises. In addition, these effects on the developing brain can actually alter the expression of genes, potentially affecting the next generation.

“What we are learning about all the elements that affect a child’s brain – whether her body is well nourished, whether her mind is stimulated, whether she is protected from violence – must change the way we think about early childhood development, and how we act,” said Mr. Lake.

“To give every child a fair chance in life, we need to invest early, invest equitably, and invest smartly – not only in education, but in health, in nutrition, and in protection.”

Evidence increasingly points to investment in early childhood as one of the most cost-effective ways to achieve sustainable development. A study on increasing pre-school enrolment in 73 countries found higher future wages of $6 - $17 per dollar invested, indicating potential long-term benefits ranging from $11 to $34 billion.
The event preludes this week’s adoption of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will officially include early childhood development as part of the transformative agenda for 2015 and beyond.

UNICEF is highlighting that early childhood development provides a natural link between the new global goals, producing a multiplier effect that can help address poverty, improve health and nutrition, promote gender equality, and reduce violence.

The Secretary-General shared a similar message, underlining that investing in early childhood development “does not just benefit children, it benefits societies.”

“We all have a shared responsibility to build this movement,” he said. “Today I ask you to make this call your own. Use your influence to make early childhood development a public priority.”

He urged the global community to make a commitment to Generation 2015, to give all the children born this year the best start in life.

**UN envoy on sexual violence in conflict wraps up official visit to Guinea**

22 September - The United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura has wrapped up an official visit to Guinea, where her Office has been supporting an investigation into events that took place in 2009 at a stadium in the capital, Conakry, where more than 100 people were killed and at least 100 women were raped during an opposition demonstration.

According to a news release, Mrs. Bangura was on a four-day visit to Guinea where she met with senior Government officials, UN agencies and civil society groups.

The Special Representative’s office is providing technical and logistical support to a Panel of Judges investigating the incidents of 28 September 2009, where at the national stadium almost 156 people were killed and 109 women were raped and subjected to other forms of sexual crimes during an opposition demonstration.

According to the release, 16 people have been indicted so far in connection with the case, including former Head of State-Moussa Dadis Camara and several high ranking military officers.

Speaking earlier this year regarding the indictments Mrs. Bangura said, “I commend the national authorities for exercising ownership, leadership and responsibility over this process which seeks to bring justice to victims of crimes committed during the horrific events which took place Conakry in broad daylight.”
UN agency warns European leaders of ‘last opportunity’ for response to refugee crisis

22 September - European Union leaders are meeting in Brussels today and tomorrow to discuss the ongoing refugee and migration crisis, in what the United Nations cautioned may be the last chance to create a coherent response to end the suffering and exploitation of refugees and migrants.

“This is a crisis of political will combined with lack of European unity that is resulting in management mayhem,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres.

“When in 1956, 200,000 Hungarians fled to Austria and Yugoslavia, not only were people properly received, but a relocation programme was quickly put into place and 140,000 people were relocated to other countries,” he noted.

“What was possible then should be possible now. Tomorrow’s EU Council meeting is absolutely crucial to overcome Europe’s divisions and create needed political commitment and momentum.”

The Office of the High Commissioner (UNHCR) has urged that the creation of 120,000 additional places for refugees be approved this week. It also noted that the refugee relocation programme cannot be implemented properly without adequate reception facilities in countries where refugees are entering Europe.

On average, 6,000 people arrive in Europe each day, and many tens of thousands are likely to require assistance at any given time.

In addition to the relocation programme, UNHCR has proposed a number of measures to help Europe resolve the crisis, including strong European support for the immediate creation of facilities in Greece to receive, assist, register and screen refugees arriving by sea. Similar facilities may also be required in Serbia or other EU countries.

It also called for the commencement of the relocation of 40,000 refugees to participating EU countries, as previously agreed, to be expanded with voluntary pledges by EU States for an additional 120,000 places, a figure UNCHR notes will likely increase in the future.

Measures are also needed to provide additional humanitarian funding and structural support to countries hosting refugee populations, including an increase in opportunities for Syrian refugees to access legal channels to the EU, including enhanced resettlement and humanitarian admission, family reunification and humanitarian and student visas.

UNHCR also noted the need to strengthen the mechanisms for the humane return of people not in need of international protection using the search-and-rescue operation FRONTEX.

Only a united European emergency response can address the present refugee and migration crisis, cautioned UNHCR, noting that Europe can no longer afford to continue with a disjointed approach that creates “chaos and desperation” among thousands of refugees.

“This may be the last opportunity for a coherent European response to manage a crisis that is increasing suffering and exploitation of refugees and migrants and tension between countries,” the agency stated.
UN chief praises progress of panel to investigate chemical weapons in Syria

22 September - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today congratulated the leadership of a panel that has been charged with establishing a mechanism to investigate the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) was established this past August after the passage of a resolution by the UN Security Council. The joint body has been tasked with identifying “individuals, entities, groups, or governments involved in the use of chemicals as weapons, including chlorine or any other toxic chemical” in Syria.

Speaking at a regularly scheduled press briefing, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric said that Mr. Ban met today with Head of OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, Ms. Virginia Gamba, as well as Mr. Adrian Neritani and Mr. Eberhard Schanze, the Deputies to Ms. Gamba, who together comprise the Leadership Panel of the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

“The Secretary-General congratulated the members of the JIM Leadership Panel on their respective appointments, and expressed his confidence in their ability to lead the work of the JIM with utmost integrity and professionalism,” said Mr. Dujarric.

The Spokesperson added that Ms. Gamba had provided the Secretary-General with an update on the progress made toward ensuring the mechanism was fully operational, and that both agreed on the importance of the mechanism’s independence and impartiality.

Mr. Dujarric also took the opportunity to share the Secretary-General’s concern over “the continuing allegations of the use of chemical as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic” as well as his condemnation of any use of chemical weapons.

“In this context, the Secretary-General underlined that the unique mandate of the JIM demonstrates the determination of the international community to hold those who use chemical weapons accountable,” said the Spokesperson.

UN envoy hopes intra-Syrian thematic discussions will ‘set the stage’ for end to conflict

22 September - Returning from consultations with Syrian interlocutors in Damascus and Istanbul, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria announced today that he met with facilitators appointed by the Secretary-General to head working groups designed to find a political solution to the five-year conflict.

Last July, Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura presented the initiative before the Security Council, which endorsed it in August. The plan calls for consultations and discussions with Syrian parties in four thematic working groups.

“The Working Groups are intended to provide Syrians with a platform to address in-depth themes that are certainly not new, but have lacked to date sustained intra-Syrian discussion.” Mr. de Mistura said in a note to correspondents.

“It is hoped that their outcomes could eventually set the stage for a Syrian agreement to end the conflict on the basis of the Geneva Communique,” he added, referring to the document that was agreed in 2012 and sets out a clear roadmap for a democratic transition and remains the basis for any peaceful settlement.
While the participation of Syrians is central to move forward, the Security Council has also “emphasised the need for robust international and regional assistance” in support of the efforts of the Special Envoy, the note added.

The facilitators appointed by the Secretary-General for the thematic working groups are: Jan Egeland for safety and protection; Nicolas Michel for political and legal issues; Volker Perthes for military, security and counter-terrorism; and Birgitta Holst Alani for continuity of public services, reconstruction and development.

Over the last two days, Mr. de Mistura and his deputy, Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, met with the facilitators and discussed draft agendas with a view “to ensuring coordination and parallel progress of the working groups.”

Mr. de Mistura is now heading to New York to carry these discussions forward in the margins of the UN General Assembly.

“This is the defining humanitarian challenge of our times,” the envoy stated. “The Syrians deserve that we move faster towards a political solution.”

**Ban urges Israelis, Palestinians to defuse tensions, prevent escalation**

**22 September** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has urged both the Israeli and Palestinian sides to defuse tensions and prevent an escalation of the current situation on the ground, during a recent phone call with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

During Saturday’s phone call, the Secretary-General and President Abbas exchanged views on the recent tensions at the Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount compound, according to a readout issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson.

The Secretary-General regretted recent instances of inflammatory rhetoric which will only serve to increase mistrust and worsen an already difficult situation on the ground and urged all to refrain from it.

Last week, the escalating tensions around holy sites in Jerusalem drew concern from Mr. Ban and the UN Security Council. In his call with President Abbas, the Secretary-General stressed the need for the status quo at the holy sites to be maintained.

Mr. Ban has also condemned the rocket attacks by extremist Palestinian militants on Israel from Gaza earlier this week.

**UN rights experts urge Saudi Arabia to immediately halt child executions**

**22 September** - A group of independent United Nations human rights experts today urged the Saudi Arabian Government to stop the imminent execution of Ali Mohammed al-Nimr, convicted for a crime he allegedly committed as a child.

According to a press release, Mr. al-Nimr, then a high school student, was arrested in 2012 when he was 17 by the Saudi authorities for his reported participation in ‘Arab Spring’ protests in Qatif, Eastern Province. The Specialized Criminal Court in May 2015 sentenced him to death for joining a criminal group and attacking police officers. He was reportedly subjected to torture and ill treatment by the General Investigation Directorate which forced him to confess the charges against him.

“Confessions obtained under torture are unacceptable and cannot be used as evidence before court. Any judgment imposing the death penalty upon persons who were children at the time of the offence, and their execution, are incompatible with Saudi Arabia’s international obligations,” said the Special Rapporteurs, while recalling the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Saudi Arabia is a party.
As per the news release, Mr. al-Nimr’s appeal made by his lawyer was heard without prior notification and the proceedings fell short of international standards.

“Mr. al-Nimr did not receive a fair trial and his lawyer was not allowed to properly assist him and was prevented from accessing the case file. International law, accepted as binding by Saudi Arabia, provides that capital punishment may only be imposed following trials that comply with the most stringent requirements of fair trial and due process, or could otherwise be considered an arbitrary execution,” said the experts.

The Special Rapporteurs also asked the Saudi authorities to “ensure a fair retrial of Ali Mohammed al-Nimr and to immediately halt the scheduled execution.”

Two other individuals are at risk of an imminent execution after being arrested for their participation in Qatif when they were children.

“We urge the Saudi authorities to establish a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, halt executions of persons convicted who were children at the time of the offence, and ensure a prompt and impartial investigation into all alleged acts of torture,” urged the human rights experts.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

Philippines: UN experts calls for probe into killings of indigenous rights defenders


In a news release, they acknowledged the announcement made by the Philippines about ongoing probes into the murders and stressed the need for carrying out independent investigations.

“We take note of the announcement made today at the Human Rights Council in Geneva by the delegation of the Philippines that an investigation is underway,” said the Special Rapporteurs on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, and on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst.

“We urge the Philippines authorities to ensure that such investigation into these tragic events be carried out independently to identify and bring perpetrators to justice, to ensure the safe return of the indigenous peoples displaced by the recent violent events, and guarantee redress to the victims’ families in compliance with their indigenous traditions and demilitarization and restoration of peace in regions affected by armed conflicts including in Surigao del Sur and Bukidnon,” they said.

One of the human rights defenders was found murdered in a classroom of the Alternative Learning Center for Agriculture and Development, where he served as director, according to the news release.

The Philippine Army and alleged members of paramilitary forces occupied the school and had detained the director before killing him. The forced occupation led to about 2,000 residents to evacuate to the neighbouring Tandag city.

“Military occupation of civilian institutions and killing of civilians, particularly in places such as schools which should remain safe havens for children from this type of violence, are unacceptable, deplorable and contrary to international human rights and international humanitarian standards,” the Special Rapporteurs said.

The other two victims were representatives of the Manobo community, including a tribal chief and Chairperson of
MAPASU, an organization fighting against human rights violation in indigenous communities.

Last month, five members of an indigenous Manobo family were brutally murdered, allegedly by members of the Philippine Army in Mendis, Pangantucan, Bukidnon. The victims included a 72-year-old blind person and two children.

Mr. Forst expressed grave concerns about the increasing numbers of killings of human rights activists in conflict-prone Philippines. He also urged the Government to accept his request to visit the country to assess the situation of human rights activists in Philippines through dialogue and cooperation.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

**Thousands of women on the move in Europe need reproductive healthcare – UN**

**22 September** - The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) today stressed the need to ensure women refugees and migrants moving across Europe have access to life-saving sexual and reproductive healthcare, as it appealed for $4.2 million for humanitarian assistance.

“Thousands of women and girls, some of them pregnant, are on the move along the transit routes in the Balkans, often without access to basic hygiene and health services and with little protection from violence. As most of the women and girls are constantly moving, and often not registered, we need a swift, mobile and highly flexible response to meet their needs,” said UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin.

According to a news release issued by UNFPA, about 13 per cent of refugees and migrants entering Europe are women. If the crisis worsens, the agency has projected an estimate of 70,000 women to be moving along the Balkans route over the next six months. Of these women, 4,200 are likely to be pregnant and about 1,400 are at risk of sexual violence.

“We must ensure that women and girls can make their journey safely, and that they get the services they need to stay healthy along the way. These investments help save lives now, and many of them also help build sustainable capacities that the host populations will continue to benefit from in the future,” added Dr. Osotimehin.

UNFPA plans to distribute 70,000 dignity kits over the next six months to serve the projected amount of women travelling through the area. The kit would include basic hygiene and healthcare items that can help women and girls to preserve their dignity on the move. Mobile clinics will be set up at strategic points, staffed with gynaecologists and nurses along with materials for safe-deliveries and prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases.

UNFPA will also boost the capacity of governments and civil society groups in the affected countries to provide quality health services for women and to prevent and manage sexual and gender-based violence.
Libyan parties encouraged to act on UN-backed peace plan

22 September - The United Nations envoy for Libya has announced the finalization of a proposed peace plan to end the political crisis in the North African nation, adding that it is now up to the parties to act on the text.

“We have now a text that is the final text,” the Special Representative and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya, Bernardino León, said last night at a press conference in Skhirat, Morocco, where the UN-facilitated political dialogue has been taking place.

“Our part of the process is now finished. Now it is up to the parties, up to the participants in the dialogue, to react to this text,” he added.

Mr. León said that while some parties may not like elements of the proposed agreement, they should “put the interest of their country above any other consideration.”

“They have to be positive,” he stated. “They have to see what this process is going to bring to the country and not be concerned of what they would have liked to see in the text or to see as [the] outcome of this process… This is not the question today. The question today is to get Libya back on track to build peace, development, prosperity in the country.”

Touching on the security situation in Benghazi, Mr. León said: “We call on all the Libyans to be responsible and to refrain from any action that could hinder and complicate even more the possibilities of success in this process.”

The envoy hoped that all the parties to the peace agreement will be ready to discuss the names of the new unity government immediately after the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr on Wednesday, adding that if all went to plan, the closing session of the dialogue could take place in New York during the week of the UN General Assembly.

The participants, he noted, expressed the wish to sign the final peace agreement in Libya in the coming weeks, hopefully before the UN deadline of 20 October.

Mr. León added the proposed plan meant good news for Libya and the international community. “Today there is a clear possibility for the chaos to finish, with a clear definition of who is the government,” he said, “with the unity that will allow them to return to what Libya always was, a rich country, a healthy country.”

Yemen: UN chief ‘extremely concerned’ at escalating ground fighting and airstrikes

22 September - The United Nations Secretary-General today voiced extreme concern at the escalating ground fighting and airstrikes that have caused further devastation to Yemen’s cities and an ever-growing number of civilian casualties in recent days.

In a statement, issued by his spokesperson, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recalled that all parties to the conflict are obligated to take all feasible precautions to avoid loss of civilian life and damage to civilian objects. He also reiterated the need for accountability for serious violations of international law that may have occurred during the conflict.

Fighting between the Government and rebel Houthi forces in the country has raged for more than a year, claiming the lives of more than 2,000 civilians.

Meanwhile, the statement further noted that the Secretary-General welcomes the release last Sunday of three Saudi citizens, two American citizens, and one British citizen by the Houthi forces.
“This measure represents a concrete and positive step in efforts to lessen tensions in the region and ease the path to a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Yemen,” it added.

It underlined that the Secretary-General hopes that the release of these six foreign citizens will be followed immediately by the release of all civilians detained or held for political reasons in Yemen.

Mr. Ban also called upon all parties in the conflict to work with his Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, in the search for a durable political solution.