As Central African Republic crisis deepens, UN relief chief urges greater efforts to protect civilians

22 October - The United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator today called for greater and more sustained international commitment to the Central African Republic (CAR), where a worsening humanitarian crisis is impacting half the country's population.

“We must persevere in our support for the Central African Republic,” said Stephen O'Brien, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, speaking to the press at the end of his mission to the country.

“The situation here needs to have the world's attention,” he continued. “Not only are people suffering, but violence continues to be waged, preventing good governance, the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance, and a chance for Central Africans to begin building a better future.”

Mr. O'Brien was in CAR to see the consequences of the conflict in the country, which broke out in September, aggravating an already dire humanitarian situation.

More than half of the country's population is currently in need of humanitarian assistance. The number of internally displaced people (IDPs) is 400,000, while some 454,000 people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

During his visit, Mr. O'Brien saw the Saint Sauveur IDP site and PK5 neighbourhood in Bangui, as well as the Dekoa area, where more than 10,000 people were recently displaced.

“I have spoken to internally displaced people in Dekoa,” said Mr. O'Brien. “I have heard from them what it is like to escape...
from violence, looking for safety. I have witnessed the extraordinary efforts made by humanitarian actors to bring them life-saving assistance and protection, despite challenging circumstances.”

While meeting with members of the transitional Government, the Under-Secretary-General urged respect for humanitarian principles, free movement, and access for humanitarian workers.

“People have only one wish: to go home and to return to their lives in safety,” he said. “It is our collective responsibility to provide them with shelter, assistance and protection, until such time as the conditions are sufficient for their voluntary return.”

Mr. O’Brien today released $12 million from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support life-saving assistance for people affected by the conflict in CAR. “CERF continues to provide a life-line for humanitarian operations in CAR, but additional funds are urgently needed to meet the scale of the challenge,” said Mr. O’Brien. “I urge donors to continue supporting vital relief efforts in CAR.”

The top relief official's visit follows the most recent eruption of violence, which was sparked in the capital, Bangui, on 26 September, when according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), violent clashes erupted between the residents of PK5 in Bangui's 3rd district and the 5th district after the death of a young Muslim taxi motorcyclist. The violence left dozens of people dead and several injured. Houses were looted in other neighbourhoods and many burned. Thousands of people have fled the areas with heightened tension to seek refuge mostly with host families and in displacement sites.

**Political failures, lack of hope, at root of latest Israeli-Palestinian violence – UN deputy chief**

22 October - The Israel-Palestine conflict has “once again entered a dangerous phase,” United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson told the Security Council today, warning that the latest eruption of violence, rising tensions at holy sites in Jerusalem and the alarmingly vitriolic nature of public discourse in the region is rooted in the lack of hope on both sides that peace is possible and the absence of a genuine political horizon.

Stressing that the violence gripping the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as Israel and Gaza shows no signs of abating, Mr. Eliasson strongly condemned all attacks against Israelis and Palestinians alike. “The recent wave of knife attacks and shootings is particularly appalling. There can be no justification for such despicable acts,” he declared.

Mr Eliasson’s briefing to the Council, in a meeting chaired by José Manuel García-Margallo, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain, which holds the 15-member body’s presidency for the month, comes as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is wrapping up a three-day mission to the region, including Jordan, to ease tensions.

The first priority for all, Mr. Eliasson said, to immediately take steps to de-escalate the situation and urgently achieve real progress towards a negotiated two-state solution. Underscoring the urgency of swiftly calming tensions, he reported that from 1 to 21 October, 47 Palestinians and seven Israelis had been killed. More than 5,000 Palestinians and some 70 Israelis have been injured.

He added that the conflict deteriorated mainly due to loss of hope in Palestinians to achieve a viable Palestinian state, poor economy in the country along with lack of job and opportunities, lack of security and legal and administrative processes and the ‘stifling and humiliating occupation’ that Palestinians have lived under for almost half a century.

“They see, instead, the growth of illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, which undermines the very possibility of a two-state solution and poses growing security risks to all. They see the emergence of a parallel de-facto settler community, with better infrastructure, services and security than in Palestinian populated areas,” Mr. Eliasson explained.
Additionally, he stressed that the Israeli population is also gripped with a sense of fear as the recurrence of violence threatens their personal security. Moreover, Israeli’s are alarmed over the signs that anti-Semitism is on the rise globally.

“We must understand these Israeli concerns. Israelis see growing attempts in the international community at what they believe is aimed at ‘de-legitimization’ of the State of Israel. When confronted with a climate of terror, Israelis rightly expect their authorities to enforce security,” said Mr. Eliasson.

He further condemned attacks against holy sites and urged both sides to respect the sanctity of such sites, especially by denying ‘extremist elements any opportunity to transform the current situation into a religious conflict.’

He condemned the shameful boasts by militant Palestinian groups, including members of Hamas and specified that “there is nothing ‘heroic’ about the killing of an innocent man and the serious injury of his wife and two-year old child as they walked through Jerusalem’s Old City.”

He also condemned attacks on the 65-year-old woman near a bus station in Tel Aviv and the killing of an Israeli couple while driving with their four children. Failing to stop all attacks against Palestinian and Israelis would only let extremists to promote their aggressive agendas.

“This is murder, full stop. Crimes like these risk perpetuating the current climate of fear and mistrust. We call on all stakeholders, including the Palestinian leadership, to unequivocally condemn the violence and stand up publicly to extremism and incitement.”

He also welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu’s repeated assurances that it will not change the historic status quo at the Haram al Sharif and Temple Mount. He further commended the Prime Minister’s decision to ban Ministers and Knesset members from visiting the Holy Sites.

Mr. Eliasson also expressed the concerns of the Secretary General about Israeli authorities targeting homes of alleged perpetrators of attacks against Israeli civilians and security forces.

“Incitement is another factor significantly fuelling the situation. While the leadership on both sides have tempered their rhetoric of late, misleading and inflammatory public statements continue to surface from all sides.

The vitriolic nature of the public discourse is alarming. “Every incident that takes place evokes impassioned narratives and counter-narratives that feed a vicious cycle of hatred and division,” he added.

Mr. Eliasson stressed the need to de-escalate the violence and emphasized that efforts must be taken to restore hope in Palestinians and Israelis that peace is still possible.

“We must urgently achieve real progress towards a negotiated two-state solution. To do so, we must see significant change of policies, consistent with prior agreements, which will strengthen the Palestinian institutions, economy and security,” said Mr. Eliasson.

“We need to hear Palestinian leaders address sincerely Israelis’ legitimate security concerns and see them take steps to end incitement,” he added.

Lastly, he urged the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East peace process to continue its outreach to regional and international partners to contribute to a comprehensive resolution of the conflict.

He also reaffirmed the commitment of United Nations to at the side of Israelis, Palestinians and international partners to advance this crucial goal towards peace and reconciliation.
New UN health agency report cites measures to reduce risks from climate pollutants

22 October - The World Health Organization (WHO) today spotlighted the need to reduce short-lived climate pollutants like black carbon, ozone, methane and carbon dioxide that contribute to climate change and lead to more than 7 million deaths linked to air pollution each year.

“Every day, these pollutants threaten the health of men, women and children,” said WHO Assistant Director-General Dr. Flavia Bustreo upon release of the report, Reducing global health risks through mitigation of short-lived climate pollutants.

“For the first time, this report recommends actions that countries, health and environment ministries, and cities can take right now to reduce emissions, protect health and avoid illness and premature deaths, which often take the greatest toll on the most vulnerable,” Dr. Bustreo said.

WHO said it rated more than 20 available and affordable measures to mitigate short-lived climate pollutants, including vehicle emissions standards, capturing landfill gas, switching from fossil fuels to renewables, reducing food waste and improving household cooking fuels, to see which have the greatest potential to improve health, reduce emission of these short-lived climate pollutants and prevent climate change.

The report highlights four key interventions to reduce climate pollutants to relieve the pressures on climate change and human health:

- Reducing vehicle emissions by implementing higher emissions and efficiency standards could reduce black carbon and other co-pollutants from fossil fuels, improve air quality and reduce the disease burden attributable to outdoor air pollution;
- Policies and investments that prioritize dedicated rapid transit such as buses and trains and foster safe pedestrian and cycle networks can promote multiple benefits, including: safer active travel and reduced health risks from air and noise pollution, physical inactivity, and road traffic injuries;
- Providing cleaner and more efficient stove and fuel alternatives to the approximately 2.8 billion low-income households worldwide dependent on primarily wood, dung and other solid fuels for heating and cooking, could reduce air pollution-related diseases and reduce the health risks and time invested in fuel-gathering;
- Encouraging high and middle-income populations to increase their consumption of nutritious plant-based foods could reduce heart disease and some cancers, and slow methane emissions associated with some animal-sourced foods.

Evidence from previous WHO studies on healthy transport already suggest that shifts to mass transport and the introduction of safe walking and cycling networks are relatively inexpensive when compared with the loss of life and costs of treating people for air-pollution related illnesses, traffic injuries and diseases related to physical inactivity.

“The release of today’s report is a significant step in WHO’s ongoing work to prevent diseases and deaths related to air pollution – and towards achieving the new global health goal,” the health agency said.

In May 2015, the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution to address the health impacts of air pollution, which stresses the need for strong cooperation between different sectors and integration of health concerns into national, regional and local air-pollution-related policies.

Today’s report was produced in collaboration of the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants, a voluntary global partnership of governments, intergovernmental organizations, businesses, scientific institutions and civil society.
It comes ahead of the launch of WHO’s first climate change and health country profiles, a number of which will be released in advance of the UN climate conference, known as COP21, which will be held in Paris at the end of the year.

**World lights up in UN blue to mark Organization’s milestone anniversary**

22 October - From Australia to Azerbaijan, Indonesia to Iraq, Saudi Arabia to South Sudan, some 250 sites around the world will be lit in ‘UN blue’ beginning on Friday as part of the global celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the United Nations.

The celebration will kick off in New Zealand and from there a wave of blue – the official colour of the UN – will move across countries and continents as monuments around the world take part in the event to commemorate UN Day.

UN Headquarters in New York will light up for two nights, beginning 23 October when the annual UN Day concert will be held, and concluding on 24 October, which has been celebrated as UN Day since 1948.

The Day marks the anniversary of the entry into force of the UN Charter. With the ratification of this founding document by the majority of its signatories, including the five permanent members of the Security Council, the Organization officially came into being.

“There is no alternative to multilateralism,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his message for the Day. “As we shine a light on this milestone anniversary, let us reaffirm our commitment to a better and brighter future for all.”

The timeless values of the UN Charter must remain our guide. Our shared duty is to ‘unite our strength’ to serve ‘we the peoples,’” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his message for the Day.

“To mark this anniversary, monuments and buildings across the world are being illuminated in UN blue. As we shine a light on this milestone anniversary, let us reaffirm our commitment to a better and brighter future for all.”

Among the famous landmarks taking part in the ‘Turn the World UN Blue’ campaign will be the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, the Great Wall of China, Russia’s Hermitage Museum, and the ancient city of Petra in Jordan.

To mark this milestone 70th anniversary for the Organization, a range of activities and events have been organized throughout the year under the theme of “Strong UN. Better World.” Key events include a ceremony held in San Francisco in June to commemorate the anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter in that city in 1945.

Last month saw the publication of a coffee table book, “The United Nations at 70: Restoration and Renewal,” which combines a richly illustrated tribute to the recent restoration of the UN Headquarters complex in New York, designed by modernist architects Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer, with reflections on the Organization in its 70th year.

In addition, a selection of iconic photos and historical documents covering key moments from 70 years of UN history – from its founding in San Francisco to its work around the world today – are captured in ‘The UN at 70: Moments and Milestones’ photo exhibition on display at UN Headquarters in New York.
Senior UN official warns funding shortages could be disastrous for chronically food-insecure Mauritania

22 October - On her two-day visit to Mauritania, Ertharin Cousin, the Executive Director of the World Food Program (WFP), saw at first hand the challenges faced by nearly 1 million food insecure people amid rising malnutrition in the country.

“Mauritania has borne the brunt of recurring food crises, chronic malnutrition and instability spilling over from neighbouring Mali,” said Ms. Cousin in a press statement issued by WFP from Mauritania’s capital, Nouakchott.

“We are especially concerned about the serious malnutrition situation affecting 14 percent of Mauritania’s children under five,” she added.

At present, WFP’s funding needs are met only by half and it reports a shortage of $11 million to respond to urgent and immediate needs.

Ms. Cousin warned that a shortage of funding could have drastic consequences for vulnerable Mauritanians and Malian refugees. Indeed, with security in northern Mali still precarious, the agency notes that nearly 50,000 refugees need humanitarian assistance to meet their food needs.

The shortage in funding has led to refugees receiving reduced food rations at times that meet only about half their nutritional needs.

“We know that the resources of donor countries are stretched by so many emergencies around the world, but WFP is committed to continue to provide vital food and nutrition assistance to all Malian refugees and more than half a million Mauritanian in the grips of food insecurity and malnutrition,” she said.

On her visit, Ms. Cousin travelled to Mbera refugee camp and neighbouring host communities in southern Mauritania, on the border with Mali and met with refugees, women at a community centre, and children at a school in the camp.

She also met with mothers and malnourished children at a local health centre and held meetings with authorities, donor community and WFP staff and UN partners.

WFP also said that it is preparing to provide nutritious, hot meals to more than 150,000 children across the country once schools resume.

But with insufficient resources, the agency reports that it can only provide for two months of its 2015-2016 school meal programme.

According to the UN agency, one in four people are food-insecure in Mauritania, meaning they do not have enough food to eat to lead healthy lives.

Of these, more than 200,000 people are severely food insecure and need immediate, life-saving assistance. Female-headed families are the most affected.

The agency is working closely with the Government of Mauritania and its partners to meet immediate needs while promoting sustainable long-term development through resilience building and social protection programmes.
Ban welcomes next phase of Haiti’s electoral process, set for Sunday

22 October - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the next phase of the electoral process in Haiti, which will take place on Sunday with the first round of presidential elections, the second round of legislative elections and the holding of municipal elections.

A statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson noted that “he reiterates his call to all Haitians to exercise their democratic right to vote.”

He also commended Haiti's institutions, particularly the Provisional Electoral Council and the Haitian National Police, for the steps they have taken “to facilitate a peaceful, inclusive and transparent vote.”

“The Secretary-General deplores the violent incidents that occurred in some locations during the first round of legislative elections on 9 August,” the statement added. “He calls on the Haitian authorities to ensure that all perpetrators of electoral violence are brought to justice.”

Meanwhile, Mr. Ban urged all political parties, candidates and their supporters to conclude their electoral campaigns peacefully, resolve any disputes that may arise through established legal procedures and support the Provisional Electoral Council in the next stage of the process.

The UN chief also reaffirmed the commitment of the UN to extend its full support to the Haitian people in the fulfilment of their democratic aspirations.

UN expert on right to housing challenges governments to end homelessness

22 October - Saying human rights have been largely absent from discussions of urban development at a time when more than half the world’s population lives in cities, the UN independent expert on adequate housing today challenged governments to end homelessness and improve living conditions for all.

“I am convinced we can end the scourge of homelessness and improve living conditions for over a billion people worldwide,” Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing said as she presented her latest report to the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee – the Organization’s main body dealing with social, humanitarian and cultural issues.

Her report describes how urban centres are facing a future where vast inequalities are growing, segregating those who have resources from those who do not.

“On its current path, urbanization is simply unsustainable,” Ms Farha said.

With the right to adequate housing as a pillar, the report notes, a human rights framework can provide the coherence and consistency sorely needed in the so-called ‘New Urban Agenda’ to achieve sustainable, inclusive cities for all – a goal also of the just-adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“Human rights have been largely absent from discussions of urban development,” Ms. Farha said as she launched a yearlong
campaign to ensure that a human rights framework is included in all aspects of the New Urban Agenda.

In the wake of the adoption of the SDGs and in the lead up to Habitat III, the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development scheduled for October 2016, the human rights expert said “we have an exceptional opportunity to change the way we think about cities, not only as engines of development but also as places where human rights are realized and celebrated.”

Habitat III will be the first global summit of the 21st century where housing and urban challenges will be in the spotlight.

“Major housing issues confronting cities such as the wild growth of informal settlements, social exclusion and increasing homelessness will only be solved if the right to adequate housing is properly understood and incorporated into all aspects of urban development,” she said.

She also said she was “firmly committed to working closely with local and national governments, UN agencies, civil society and private actors to ensure a strong human rights outcome in Habitat III.”

Ms. Farha took her function as the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing in June 2014. As an independent expert in the UN Human Rights system, she works on a voluntary basis, is not UN staff and does not receive a salary for her work.

**South Sudan: UN calls for immediate access to conflict-affected areas to prevent ‘catastrophe’**

22 October - Three United Nations agencies today warned that extreme hunger is pushing people to the brink of a catastrophe in parts of South Sudan, as a new analysis found that 3.9 million people nationwide now face severe food insecurity.

“Since fighting broke out nearly two years ago, children have been plagued by conflict, disease, fear and hunger,” said Jonathan Veitch, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) representative in South Sudan, in a press release.

“Theyir families have been extraordinary in trying to sustain them, but have now exhausted all coping mechanisms. Agencies can support, but only if we have unrestricted access. If we do not, many children may die,” he added.

UNICEF, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) are calling on the parties to the conflict to grant urgent and unrestricted access to Unity State, where a newly released Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis shows that at least 30,000 people are living in extreme conditions and are facing starvation and death.

Since the civil war started in December 2013, it is the first time that an IPC analysis has found any parts of the population in phase five—considered a “catastrophe”—on the five-point IPC scale.

“This is the start of the harvest and we should be seeing a significant improvement in the food security situation across the country, but unfortunately this is not the case in places like southern Unity State, where people are on the edge of a catastrophe that can be prevented,” said WFP Country Director Joyce Luma.

“The people of South Sudan need peace, nutritious food and other humanitarian assistance and livelihood support to survive and rebuild their lives,” she added.

Unless unrestricted humanitarian access is urgently granted, the agencies said, food insecurity could deteriorate to famine in parts of Unity State, where humanitarian assistance has been hampered by the dreadful violence and lack of access in recent months. Some displaced families say they survive on just one meal a day consisting of only fish and water lilies.
Throughout the country, the IPC analysis indicates that 3.9 million people in South Sudan face severe hunger. Although the number of food insecure households has reportedly decreased, as expected, during the harvest season, it is almost 80 per cent higher than in the same period last year, as even people living in states not directly affected by the conflict struggle with its long-term effects, erratic rainfall, depleted livelihood options, high food prices, fuel costs and inflation, in a generally degraded economic environment.

In addition, the IPC highlights that the overall nutrition situation remains critical, with Global Acute Malnutrition among children under five above the emergency threshold in the conflict-affected states of Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity in September, and high in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap throughout the year. The high prevalence is attributed to inadequate food consumption, poor maternal and child feeding practices, illnesses and limited delivery of health and nutrition services.

Meanwhile, the three agencies – which work on food security and nutrition – warned that the dire economic situation in the country is contributing to record-high food prices that significantly affect families’ purchasing power and worsening levels of food insecurity. Even areas previously unaffected are now showing signs of severe deterioration, with large proportions of the population in Greater Bahr el Ghazal states in food security crisis.

“Looking forward to the completion of the 2015 cropping season by the end of the year, a below average cereal production is expected in Uganda, the Sudan and Ethiopia, which will further aggravate the food import bill in South Sudan,” said Serge Tissot, the Head of FAO in South Sudan.

“By creating ways to support crop, livestock and fish producers, the resilience of these communities will be strengthened,” he added.

UNICEF, WFP and FAO, together with other UN and non-governmental organization partners, indicated they are reaching millions of people with lifesaving food, nutrition aid and emergency livelihood kits. The rapid response missions are channelling assistance to many remote areas otherwise cut from humanitarian relief.

Quick support for local food production can also contribute to the longer-term food security of the most affected people, the agencies stressed, while calling on the international community to provide the resources needed to sustain and expand these lifesaving efforts.

**In Jordan, Ban stresses responsibility of Arab leaders to ensure Middle East ‘crisis doesn’t get out control’**

22 October - Continuing his visit to Middle Eastern countries to help ease current tensions between Israel and Palestine, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met today with King Abdullah II of Jordan in Amman, and stressed the responsibility of Arab leaders “to encourage calm and to ensure that this crisis does not get out of control.”

“The Secretary-General briefed the King about his meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, in which he appealed to them to put an end to the continuing violence in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Israel,” indicated a readout issued by the Secretary-General’s spokesperson.

He also reiterated the importance of reducing tensions at the holy places in Jerusalem and called for upholding the status quo in line with previous understandings between Israel and Jordan, and with respect to Jordan's special role.

The UN chief's visit to the region comes in the wake of an uptick in violence since early September. A series of ever-more deadly clashes between Palestinians and Israelis, including Israeli security forces, has marked much of October, with incidents reported in more than 50 different locations, including in East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem, Jenin, Tulkarm and Nablus.
UN human rights chief urges Czech Republic to halt detention of migrants and refugees

22 October - The top United Nations human rights official today strongly criticized the detention of migrants and refugees in the Czech Republic, drawing attention to the violations of the rights of children among them and to credible reports that authorities are routinely strip-searching migrants to confiscate the $10 a day they are charged for their own detention.

“The fact that people are being forced to pay for their own detention is particularly reprehensible,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein.

Mr. Zeid’s Office (OHCHR) said the Czech Republic “is unique” in routinely subjecting these migrants and refugees to detention for 40 days, and reportedly sometimes even longer – up to 90 days – in conditions which have been described as degrading.

“According to credible reports from various sources, the violations of the human rights of migrants are neither isolated nor coincidental, but systematic: they appear to be an integral part of a policy by the Czech Government designed to deter migrants and refugees from entering the country or staying there,” Mr. Zeid said.

Over the last two months, several European countries of transit have been employing restrictive policies against migrants and refugees trying to reach European countries further north.

“Many of these people are refugees who have suffered horrendously in their countries of origin as well as during their journey to the Czech Republic,” the High Commissioner said.

Mr. Zeid also singled out the violations of the rights children among those in detention.

“International law is quite clear that immigration detention must be strictly a measure of last resort. And as for children, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has emphasized that detention of children on the sole basis of their migration status, or that of their parents, is a violation, is never in their best interests, and is not justifiable,” he said.

He noted that most detained migrants and refugees are not in a position to swiftly challenge their detention in court – as is their right – because they do not receive information about free legal aid and because civil society organizations have reportedly been receiving very restricted access to detention facilities.

Mr. Zeid also expressed concern about the conditions in the detention facilities, particularly in Bílá-Jezová north of the capital, Prague, which the Czech Republic’s own Minister of Justice Robert Pelikán has described as being “worse than in a prison.” The Minister criticized the detention policy itself, saying that the migrants “had committed only an administrative offence, for which they should not be locked up for up to 90 days.”

He also welcomed the 13 October report by Czech Ombudsperson Anna Šabatová, who spoke of parents being treated in a degrading way in front of their children, who are traumatized by the constant presence of heavily armed personnel. At the time of her visit, there were 100 children detained in Bílá-Jezová.

Mr. Zeid also referred to credible reports that migrants have been routinely strip-searched by the authorities looking to
confiscate money in order to pay the $10 per day each person is charged for their involuntary stay in the detention centres. This payment is demanded by the authorities from all migrants, without clear legal grounds, leaving many of them destitute upon their release.

Ban urges dialogue to ease tensions ahead of constitutional referendum in Republic of Congo

22 October - Concerned about tensions between opposition parties and the Government of the Republic of the Congo ahead of the referendum on a new draft constitution in the country, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has encouraged all stakeholders to choose the path of dialogue and to peacefully resolve any disputes that might arise.

A statement released yesterday evening by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson stressed his concerns about tensions between the Congo Government and the opposition ahead of the 25 October referendum. “Reports of recent violence are particularly worrying,” noted the statement.

“The Secretary-General encourages all stakeholders to choose the path of inclusive political dialogue ahead of the referendum, and to resolve peacefully any dispute that may arise from this exercise,” the statement said.

The UN chief in the statement also called on the authorities in the Republic of Congo to safeguard the right to peaceful demonstration.

‘Silence is too often the only safe option left’ – new UN report on sources and whistleblowers

22 October - Governments and international organizations are failing to ensure adequate protections to whistleblowers and sources of information, according to a new report by the UN special rapporteur on freedom of expression.

“Countless sources and whistleblowers around the world are intimidated by officials, co-workers, and others, depriving everyone of information that may be critical to public debate and accountability,” David Kaye, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression told UN General Assembly during the presentation of his study.

“All too often, those revealing allegations of wrongdoing lack effective protection,” the human rights expert warned delegates in the Assembly’s Third Committee – the Organization’s main body dealing with social, humanitarian and cultural issues. “Silence is too often the only safe option left to them, with the public left in the dark and wrongdoing left unpunished.”

In the first major UN report devoted to the subject, Mr. Kaye reviews national and international norms and practices and presents recommendations to establish or improve available protections.

“The problem of source protection extends beyond traditional journalists to bloggers, citizen reporters, [non-governmental organization] researchers, authors, academics, and many others,” the expert noted. “How can they carry out investigative work if they cannot extend the basic assurances of confidentiality to their sources?”

“While there are major gaps in protections, there are also important advancements in norms protecting sources and whistleblowers around the world. Yet they are often riven with loopholes or, even with strong legal protections, not enforced in practice,” he continued.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the study also emphasizes that the right of access to information – central to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – requires that authorities
take into account the public interest of information disclosed when adopting measures against unauthorized disclosures.

“States may restrict access to information in specific areas and narrow circumstances, yet the disclosure of information relating to human rights or humanitarian law violations should never be the basis of penalties of any kind,” Mr. Kaye underscored.

The study notes that the UN and other international organizations also frequently fail to protect their own whistleblowers. “The UN, as most international organizations, has adopted rules for enabling whistleblowing and prohibiting retaliation. Yet allegations of wrongdoing and retaliation are rarely protected effectively,” the human rights expert noted.

“Without protection against retaliation, few would disclose wrongdoing. Protections should be detailed explicitly in law, providing clarity for whistleblowers and others on the nature of the protection they may seek,” the Special Rapporteur said, calling upon Governments and international organizations to strengthen protection mechanisms for sources and whistleblowers.

Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, an independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanism that addresses specific country situations. They do not receive a salary for their work and are independent from any government.