With parties ‘deeply divided over path to peace,’ Yemen faces Balkanization, Security Council warned

22 December - The Security Council must act now to end the fighting in Yemen or face the irreversible Balkanization of the country, creating safe havens for terrorists and potentially shattering regional stability, the United Nations human rights chief warned today.

“I urgently call on the Council to expedite and intensify diplomatic efforts to bring about a ceasefire and help create a framework for negotiating a comprehensive and sustainable peace,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein told the 15-member body, stressing that life has become untenable for the vast majority of Yemenis, with at least 21 million people, 80 per cent of the population, reliant on some measure of humanitarian aid.

“Failure to act decisively does not only spell misery for the millions of vulnerable people in Yemen today. It would inevitably push the country into an irreversible process of Balkanization, the consequences of which would lie outside of anyone’s control.

“The potential ramifications of a failed state in Yemen would almost inevitably create safe havens for radical and confessional groups such as the so-called ISIS (or ISIL, Islamic State in Syria and the Levant). This, in turn, could expand the conflict beyond Yemen’s borders, potentially shattering regional stability.”

Mr. Zeid said he was encouraged by recent UN-brokered peace talks in Switzerland, but these were adjourned on Sunday for a month in the face of numerous ceasefire violations to allow for bi-lateral in-country and regional consultations to achieve a proper cessation of hostilities.
Meanwhile, intensified fighting has resulted in a dramatic increase in civilian casualties, with over 600 children killed and more than 900 seriously injured, a five-fold rise over 2014. More than 2,700 civilians have been killed and over 5,300 injured since the start of the conflict.

“I have observed with extreme concern the continuation of heavy shelling from the ground and the air in areas with high a concentration of civilians as well as the perpetuation of the destruction of civilian infrastructure – in particular hospitals and schools – by all parties to the conflict, although a disproportionate amount appeared to be the result of airstrikes carried out by Coalition Forces,” Mr. Zeid said.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, who facilitated the talks in Switzerland, told the Council that although the meetings did not end the fighting “as we all had hoped,” they did see constructive talks between the Government and its opponents, providing a solid foundation for a resumption in the near future.

“The talks came during a very bleak period for Yemen and amidst a worsening security situation,” he said, citing hundreds of civilian deaths, the catastrophic state of Yemen’s health care system, cross-border attacks in the north with heavy weaponry, air and artillery attacks on the central city of Taiz, and a security vacuum leading to a dangerous expansion of extremist groups, particularly in the south where Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula has consolidated its presence.

But he noted that the sides agreed to set up a Coordination and De-escalation Committee of military advisors from the two delegations and UN experts to minimize ceasefire violations, and that this work will continue over the coming months, commending the progress made so far.

“The talks revealed deep divisions between the two sides on the path to peace and the shape of a future agreement. Trust between the parties remains weak,” he declared. “The commitment of the delegations, especially the chairs, in the end proved stronger than these divisions.

“By the end of the talks, the delegations have agreed to meet again next month using a common framework which will help them map out a clear and effective path to peace, towards a negotiated and inclusive political transition.”

In her briefing to the Council, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Kyung-wha Kang detailed the “appalling” conditions faced by Yemenis, with some 7.6 million requiring emergency food aid to survive, and at least two million malnourished, including 320,000 children suffering from severe malnutrition, a two-fold increase since March.

At least 1.8 million children have had to drop out of classes, adding to the 1.6 million who were already out of school before the crisis began. Over 170 schools have been destroyed, and more than 600 damaged. At least 58 schools have been occupied by armed groups, nearly all of them in Taiz Governorate; another 238 are hosting people displaced by the violence.

Some 14 million people lack adequate access to health-care assistance, and relentless airstrikes, shelling and violence continue to force families from their homes, with over 2.5 million internally displaced – an eight-fold increase since the start of the conflict.

“Despite a challenging and dangerous environment, humanitarian organizations on the ground are responding with life-saving assistance,” Ms. Kang declared. “Four million people have been provided access to emergency water and sanitation through water trucking and provision of fuel.

“Since April, monthly food distributions have been steadily expanding, with 1.9 million people reached in November and 3 million people planned for December. By February, five million people should be receiving food assistance each month across the country,” she added.

“UN agencies and partners will continue to scale up our assistance to save lives. However, only a political settlement can end the immense suffering facing more than 20 million men, women and children in Yemen today.”
Syria: Security Council demands immediate humanitarian access across battle lines

22 December - In its first resolution on Syria since granting the United Nations an enhanced role in seeking to end the five-year-long war, the Security Council today demanded that all parties, particularly the Syrian authorities, immediately open routes across conflict lines and borders to let in vital humanitarian aid.

In a unanimous resolution voicing grave concern at the lack of compliance with several previous Council demands for such access, the 15-member body expressed “outrage” at the escalating violence and killing of over 250,000 people, including tens of thousands of children, and renewed for a further 12 months its authorization of the demand for humanitarian access.

It requested “the Syrian authorities to expeditiously respond to all requests for cross-line deliveries submitted by the United Nations and their implementing partners, and to give such requests positive consideration,” and voiced grave concern that Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Nusra Front (ANF) and groups linked to Al-Qaida are also hindering access.

It cited a decline in convoy approvals by the Syrian authorities, noting that as of 31 October, only 27 out of 91 UN inter-agency requests in 2015 had been approved in principle, and that between 2013 and 2015, the percentage of convoys approved in principle declined from 65 per cent to 29 per cent.

Today’s resolution follows the Council’s authorization on Friday for the UN to play an enhanced role in shepherding the opposing sides to talks for a political transition, endorsing a timetable for a ceasefire, a new constitution and elections, all under UN auspices.

The Council said it was “gravely distressed” by the devastating humanitarian situation in Syria, with urgent humanitarian aid, including medical assistance, now required by over 13.5 million people inside the country, 6.5 million of them internally displaced, 4.5 million living in hard-to-reach areas, including Palestinian refugees, and 393,700 trapped in besieged areas.

It voiced grave concern at the failure to implement its previous calls to cease all attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including schools, medical facilities and water supply, the indiscriminate use of weapons, including artillery, barrel bombs and airstrikes, indiscriminate shelling by mortars, car bombs, suicide attacks and tunnel bombs, and the use of starvation as a means of combat.

It condemned “the widespread use of torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary executions, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, sexual and gender-based violence, as well as all grave violations and abuses committed against children.”

In the areas of Syria under ISIL and ANF control it denounced the “violent extremist ideology and actions” for the “devastating humanitarian impact” on civilians, leading to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, and it called on all States to prevent the flow of foreign terrorists into the country.

Despite all the challenges, the Council noted that over the past year, the UN and its implementing partners continue to deliver lifesaving aid to millions of people in need across borders, including food for over 2.4 million people, non-food items for 1.6 million, medical supplies for 4.1 million treatments, and water and sanitation supplies for over 1.3 million people.

But it stressed that the number of people aided in hard-to-reach and besieged areas declining, voicing “grave alarm at the
dire situation of the 393,700" trapped civilians, with the UN this year only able to reach 3.5 per cent them with health care, and only 0.7 per cent with food per month.

It also expressed “grave concern” for the more than 4.2 million refugees, including more than 3.2 million women and children, who have fled Syria, noting that the worsening crisis is further contributing to the movement of refugees and endangering regional stability.

It reiterated “its deep appreciation for the significant and admirable efforts” by Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, to accommodate Syrian refugees.

But noted “with concern” that the international response continues to fall short of meeting the needs as assessed by host governments and the UN, “urging once again all Member States, based on burden-sharing principles” to adopt medium and long-term responses to alleviate the impact on communities, provide increased and predictable funding and increase resettlement efforts.

Refugees and migrants fleeing to Europe in 2015 top unprecedented one million – UN

22 December - The number of refugees and migrants fleeing to Europe in 2015 has topped an unprecedented one million – at least 3,600 died or went missing in the crossings – the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) reported today, calling for much more to be done to receive and aid those uprooted by persecution, conflict and poverty.

“As anti-foreigner sentiments escalate in some quarters, it is important to recognize the positive contributions that refugees and migrants make to the societies in which they live and also honour core European values: protecting lives, upholding human rights and promoting tolerance and diversity,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, whose agency compiled the latest figures together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The number of people displaced by war and conflict is the highest seen in Western and Central Europe since the 1990s, when several conflicts broke out in the former Yugoslavia. One in every two of those crossing the Mediterranean this year – half a million people – were Syrians escaping war. Afghans accounted for 20 per cent and Iraqis for seven per cent.

According to UNHCR figures, as of 21 December, some 972,500 people had crossed the Mediterranean Sea, while IOM estimates that over 34,000 have crossed from Turkey into Bulgaria and Greece by land, for a total of more than 1,006,500.

Over 800,000 refugees and migrants came via the Aegean Sea from Turkey into Greece, accounting for 80 per cent of those arriving irregularly in Europe by sea, while the number of those crossing from North Africa into Italy dropped slightly, from 170,000 in 2014 to around 150,000 in 2015.

Over the year the number of people crossing the Mediterranean increased steadily from around 5,500 in January to a monthly peak in October of over 221,000.

After an initial chaotic reaction which resulted in tens of thousands of people moving from Greece through the Western Balkans and northwards, and finding themselves blocked at various borders, a more coordinated European response is beginning to take shape.

UNHCR launched an emergency response to complement European efforts, with over 600 emergency staff and resources deployed to 20 different locations to provide life-saving aid and protection, advocating for human rights and access to asylum, particularly for refugees with specific needs, such as unaccompanied children and women-headed households.

But much more needs to be done to reinforce required reception capacity at points of entry and allow for the humane and
effective accommodation, aid, registration and screening to identify those in need of protection, those to be relocated to other countries within the European Union, and those who do not qualify for refugee protection for whom dignified return mechanisms have to be put in place.

At the same time, UNHCR continues to call for safe, regular ways for refugees to find safety through more resettlement and humanitarian admission programmes, more flexible visa arrangements, more private sponsorship programmes and other possibilities.

As UN tribunal on Rwandan genocide wraps up work, Security Council cites court’s role in fight against impunity

22 December - Adopting a new resolution today, the Security Council welcomed the completion of judicial work of the United Nations tribunal set up in the wake of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, following delivery of the court’s last judgment on 14 December and its impending closure, set for 31 December 2015.

After 21 years of bringing those most responsible for the genocide to justice, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) wraps up its core judicial functions at the end of the month, and the Security Council acknowledged its “substantial contribution…to the process of national reconciliation and the restoration of peace and security, and to the fight against impunity and the development of international criminal justice, especially in relation to the crime of genocide.”

Delivering his final report to the Council earlier this month, ICTR President Judge Vagn Joensen noted that on 14 December, the Tribunal would deliver its 45th and final judgement on appeal in the Nyiramasuhuko et al. or Butare case involving six accused.

“With the completion of this case, the ICTR will formally close its doors on 31 December 2015 and only liquidation activities will remain to be completed during the first half of 2016,” he said, adding that in so doing, the ICTR will become the first ad hoc international criminal tribunal to complete its mandate and hand its remaining functions over to its residual mechanism, the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals, which the Council set up in 2010 to carry out a number of essential functions of both the ICTR and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), after the completion of their respective mandates.

As for statistics, Judge Joensen told the Council the span of its work the ICTR had held 5,800 days of proceedings, in which the tribunal brought indictments against 93 individuals, issued 55 first-instance judgements and 45 appeal judgements and heard the “powerful accounts of more than 3,000 witnesses who bravely recounted some of the most traumatic events imaginable during ICTR trials.”

Between its first and last judgement in Akayesu and in Butare, the Arusha, Tanzania-based Tribunal issued many novel judgements that have significantly impacted the evolution of international law, he noted, including the first conviction for rape and sexual violence as a form of genocide as well as the first judgement against a Head of Government since the Nuremburg and Tokyo Tribunals.

Through the text, the Security Council urged all States, especially those where [eight remaining] fugitives are suspected to be at large, to intensify their cooperation with and render all necessary assistance to the Mechanism, in particular to achieve the arrest and surrender of all remaining fugitives indicted by the ICTR as soon as possible. The Council also encouraged the Mechanism and the Rwandan Government to collaborate on matters related to the legacy of the ICTR “with respect to reconciliation and justice in Rwanda, including in respect of access to archives.”

Today’s resolution was adopted by a vote of 14 in favour, with Russia abstaining, and by it, the Council also decided to extend the term of office for 17 permanent and ad litem judges of the Trial Chambers and the Appeals Chamber at the ICTY, and reappointed Serge Brammertz as Prosecutor of tribunal for a term from 1 January 2016 until 31 December 2016.
Ban, concerned over political uncertainty in Haiti, urges transfer of power through polls

22 December - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed his concern today over growing political uncertainty in Haiti and urged the two candidates in the presidential run-off there to help the electoral process move forward while preserving the country’s democratic gains.

“The Secretary-General is concerned over the growing political uncertainty in Haiti, following the publication of the results of the 25 October elections,” which included the first round of presidential polls, read a statement issued through his spokesperson.

While taking note of the efforts by all stakeholders, including the establishment of an electoral evaluation commission on 16 December to address the concerns of opposition parties and ensure the successful and timely conclusion of the presidential elections, Mr. Ban in his statement stressed “the responsibility of all political actors to discourage violence and encourage a spirit of unity throughout the country.”

According to the statement, the UN chief “calls for the urgent intensification of dialogue to ensure the transfer of power through elections, within the constitutional timeframe, maintain stability and preserve the country’s democratic gains.”

“The Secretary-General urges the two candidates in the presidential run-off to engage in good faith with the relevant institutions to identify and implement measures to help the process move forward,” the statement said.

According to press reports, the run-off had been set for 27 December between Jovenel Moïse from the governing party and former government executive Jude Célestin, but the election has been postponed until further notice.

In his statement, Mr. Ban reaffirmed the commitment of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the entire UN system to continue supporting the Haitian people in the fulfilment of their democratic aspirations.

Security Council strongly condemns deadly terrorist attack near Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan

22 December - The United Nations Security Council today condemned “in the strongest terms” the terrorist attack in Afghanistan that killed at least six United States service members, for which the Taliban claimed responsibility, saying “no violent or terrorist acts can reverse the path towards Afghan-led peace, democracy and stability.”

In a press statement, the 15-member Security Council “underlined the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice” and urged all states to cooperate actively with the Afghan authorities in this regard.

According to news reports, a suicide bomber rammed into a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led foot patrol as it moved through a village close to the base, which is 45 kilometres (28 miles) north of Kabul.

The Council members also “reiterated their serious concern at the threats posed by the Taliban, Al-Qaida, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or Da’esh) affiliates, illegal and armed groups to the local population, national defense and security forces, and international presence in Afghanistan.”

In addition, they “reiterated that no violent or terrorist acts can reverse the path towards Afghan-led peace, democracy and
stability in Afghanistan, which is supported by the people and the Government of Afghanistan and by the international community.”

The statement “reaffirmed the need and reiterated [Council members’] determination to combat by all means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and all obligations under international law, in particular international human rights, refugee and international humanitarian law, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.”

“Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of its motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed, and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group,” it said.

Impact of El Niño could be worst in 18 years in southern Africa, warns UN ‘special alert’

22 December - Crop and livestock production prospects in southern Africa have been weakened by this year’s powerful El Niño, while the phenomenon is also impacting agricultural sectors in northern Australia, parts of Indonesia and a wide swathe of Central America and Brazil, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said today.

According to a special alert released by FAO’s Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS), the agency had already warned in March that the current El Niño would be strong, and it now appears to be the strongest episode in 18 years. It will peak at the start of 2016, before the usual harvest time for farmers in southern Africa.

El Niño is a naturally occurring phenomenon characterized by the abnormal warming of sea surface temperature in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, according to FAO. It occurs every two to seven years and can last up to 18 months. During these weather episodes, normal patterns of tropical precipitation and atmospheric circulation are disrupted, triggering extreme climate events around the globe.

South Africa has already declared drought status for five provinces, its main cereal producing regions, while Lesotho has issued a drought mitigation plan and Swaziland has implemented water restrictions as reservoir levels have become low. Wholesale maize prices are up 50 per cent from a year earlier in South Africa, while retail maize prices have doubled in Malawi and Mozambique.

“It’s the sixth week of the cropping season now and there’s not enough moisture in the soil,” said Shukri Ahmed, FAO Deputy Strategic Programme Leader – Resilience, of the situation in southern Africa.

The likelihood of another poor season is troublesome as it comes on the heels of a poor one that has already depleted inventories, tightened supplies and pushed up local prices, FAO said.

The El Niño’s effect is also being felt elsewhere in Africa, with FAO field officers in Ethiopia reporting serious crop and livestock losses among farmers and pastoralists.

And beyond southern Africa, GIEWS analysis of El Niño-related conditions also points to agricultural stress in northern Australia, parts of Indonesia and a wide swathe of Central America and Brazil, according to the alert.

FAO as also issued a warning that there is an increased risk of Rift Valley fever especially in East Africa. Outbreaks of RVF, which primarily affects sheep, goats, cattle, camels, buffaloes and antelopes, but can also be lethal to humans, are closely associated with periods of El Niño-linked heavy rainfall, which bolster habitats for the mosquitoes that carry the disease.
Nigeria’s Boko Haram insurgency forces one million children from school – UNICEF

22 December - Violence and attacks against civilian populations in northeastern Nigeria and its neighbouring countries have forced “a staggering” one million children out of school in a conflict that has dealt “a huge blow for education in the region,” the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reported today.

“Across Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, over 2,000 schools remain closed due to the conflict – some of them for more than a year – and hundreds have been attacked, looted or set on fire,” UNICEF said. “In far north Cameroon, only one out of the 135 schools closed in 2014 has re-opened this year.”

UNICEF also reported that the number of children missing out on their education due to the conflict adds to the estimated 11 million children of primary school age who were already out of school in the four countries before the onset of the crisis.

“It’s a staggering number,” said Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF’s West and Central Africa Regional Director.

“The conflict has been a huge blow for education in the region, and violence has kept many children out of the classroom for more than a year, putting them at risk of dropping out of school altogether,” added Mr. Fontaine.

In addition, Nigeria alone, approximately 600 teachers have been killed since the start of the Boko Haram insurgency.

UNICEF said it has supported 170,000 children back into education in the safer areas of the three states most in Nigeria affected by the conflict, where the majority of schools have been able to re-open.

“The challenge we face is to keep children safe without interrupting their schooling,” said Mr. Fontaine. “Schools have been targets of attack, so children are scared to go back to the classroom; yet the longer they stay out of school, the greater the risks of being abused, abducted and recruited by armed groups,” he explained.

So far, UNICEF has received 44 per cent of the funding required in 2015 to respond to the humanitarian needs of children in Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad.

And in 2016, UNICEF will need nearly $23 million to provide access to education for children affected by conflicts in the four countries, most of whom live around the Lake Chad region.
Libya’s dire humanitarian situation requires funding ‘on time and in volume,’ warns senior UN relief official

22 December - World Food Programme (WFP) trucks have begun distributing 1,300 tons of food to Libyans in dire need of assistance, but with nine days left in the year, the United Nations aid plan for more than 2.4 million people for 2016 has received zero funding, the top UN humanitarian official in the strife-torn country said today.

“We are worried about the dire humanitarian situation in Libya, if adequate funding is not allocated to respond to those in need, said the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Libya, Ali Al-Za’atri. “So far our Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016 is zero-funded,” he added.

“It is not an acceptable situation,” Mr. Al-Za’atri said, stressing that the Libyan Government and the international community need to recognize the enormity of the county’s humanitarian crisis if funding is not received on time and in volume.

“The recently launched Libya Humanitarian Response Plan identified 2.44 million people in need of protection and some form of humanitarian assistance – including 435,000 internally displaced persons – those are acute basic needs in the health, food, protection, shelter and water and sanitation sectors. Of the 2.44 million, 1.3 million Libyans are food insecure,” he explained.

Mr. Al-Za’atri also reported that the distribution, by WFP and the agency’s implementing partner on the ground, Shaik Tahir Azzawy Charity Organization, of approximately 1,300 tons of food items to Libyan communities had begun and that nearly 5,000 families displaced by the conflict will be reached in the coming weeks.

The UN World Food Programme requires $47.7 million to be able to reach the most affected in 2016, estimated at some 210,000 persons.

As WTO moves to phase out farm subsidies, UN agency urges fair policies that support food security

22 December - The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) welcomed an agreement by the World Trade Organization (WTO) to move towards eliminating agricultural export subsidies, while noting that differences remain over other measures meant to create equitable global trading conditions, particularly for developing countries.

“Greater participation in global trade is inevitable for most countries, however, the process of opening further to trade, and its consequences, will need to be well managed if trade is to improve food security,” FAO Director General José Graziano da Silva said in a news release.

A declaration issued on 19 December at the conclusion of the Tenth WTO Ministerial Conference in Nairobi, Kenya included a number of decisions in relation to an Agreement on Agriculture, with the adoption of four ministerial decisions.

The decisions addressed: competition through the elimination of many worldwide export subsidies by 2018; allowing developing countries to continue public stockpiling for food security; a Special Safeguard Mechanism for developing countries confronted with a surge of imports; and a commitment that beginning in 2016, developed countries would provide duty- and quota-free access to cotton exporters from less developed countries, if compatible with existing agreements.

While welcoming the agreement through the so called ‘Nairobi Package,’ Mr. Graziano da Silva stressed the need for a
global trade framework that allows countries to balance national food security and development objectives without harming their trading partners.

“The continued uncertainty on how to negotiate such a framework is worrying in a world in which global agricultural trade is likely to grow in importance in the coming decades as patterns of consumption and production continue to evolve,” the FAO Director-General said.

Mr. Graziano da Silva pointed to FAO’s recently released State of Agricultural Commodity Markets for 2015-16 report, which stresses the impact of trade on food security in the areas of food availability, access, utilization and stability, saying that it noted “how trade and related policies affect the different dimensions of food security in ways that vary across and even within countries, and how these change over time as countries develop.”

According to the report, balancing short- and long-term objectives is vitally important – especially when considering the various nature of disruptions and the likelihood that, due to geopolitical, weather and policy-induced uncertainties, market shocks would become more frequent.

While efforts to intervene and shield domestic markets from global price volatility could lead to increased domestic price volatility, agricultural incentives play an important role in in boosting agricultural production and efficiency and fostering broader economic growth.

While trade and food security concerns could be better reconciled in the multilateral trading system by improving the WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture, striking the right balance between better trade policy disciplines and the policy space sought by developing countries has proven difficult.

The new edition of State of Agricultural Markets report argued that the best way forward may be to resolve underlying national concerns and priorities. It noted that strengthened policy coherence for food security would enable governments to improve trade policy designs, while enhancing compliance with regional and global trade frameworks.

Ban extends condolences to people, Government of China in wake of devastating landslide.

22 December - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today extended his heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims of the devastating landslide in Shenzhen and expressed his solidarity with the people and Government of China.

“The Secretary-General fervently hopes more survivors will be found during the ongoing rescue efforts,” said a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York.

According to press reports, dozens of people remain missing after a landslide buried 33 buildings in an industrial park in Shenzhen City, south China's Guangdong Province on Sunday.
Security Council approves six-month extension of UN observer force on Golan Heights

22 December - The Security Council today extended the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) for six months, until 30 June 2016, underscoring the need for the Force to have at its disposal all necessary means to carry out its mandate safely and securely, "including technology and equipment to enhance its observation of the area of separation and the ceasefire line, and to improve force protection, as appropriate.

Unanimously adopting a new resolution to continue the Observer Force’s mandate in the Golan Heights, the 15-member body stressed the obligation of Israel and Syria to abide by the terms of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement, calling on both to scrupulously observe the ceasefire and encouraging both parties to take advantage of UNDOF’s liaison function to address issues of mutual concern.

By the terms of the text, the Council strongly condemned the continued fighting in the area of separation, including the use of heavy weapons by both the Syrian Armed Forces and armed groups in the ongoing Syrian conflict, including the use of tanks by the Syrian Armed Forces and opposition during clashes.

Also strongly condemning the incidents threatening the safety and security of UN personnel in recent months, the Council reaffirmed its readiness to consider listing individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities providing support to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or to the Al-Nusra Front, including those participating in or otherwise supporting attacks against United Nations peacekeepers.

UNDOF was established by the Security Council to monitor the ceasefire between Syria and Israel after their 1973 war. Since then, the Observer Force has remained in the area to maintain the ceasefire and to supervise the implementation of the disengagement agreement.