Central Africa: UN agency delivers food to thousands of refugees on Nigeria-Chad border

23 January - With a “tense and highly volatile” situation in North-Eastern Nigeria at the Chadian Lac border, United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced today that it has begun distributing food to thousands of refugees who have recently been displaced by the region’s escalating violence and urged that it needed some $11 million to continue to meet those needs.

“WFP rations of 159 tons has started today in the border region in Baga Sola. WFP is planning a first round of distributions for ten days to more than 7,800 refugees from Ngouboua in Nigeria, of whom 4,103 are new arrivals,” WFP spokesperson Elisabeth Byrs told reporters at a press conference in Geneva.

The situation in the Central Africa region has been deteriorating in recent months. Just last weekend, Boko Haram insurgents pillaged villages and abducted some 80 people in Cameroon in one of the biggest Boko Haram kidnappings to take place outside of Nigeria. This sparked fears throughout the region that the insurgents were gaining ground and expanding their attacks.

On Monday, Chad’s Government said it would deploy troops to Cameroon to help fight the armed group and keep the violence from spreading to other countries.

WFP was able to respond to the first wave of refugees of 6,250 persons within 48 hours of their arrival, with an
emergency ration of two days, Ms. Byrs said. There are currently more than 13,000 refugees in North-Eastern Nigeria at the Lake Chad side border, according to the latest stats from the UN refugee agency (UNHCR).

Ms. Byrs today expressed concern over the impact this refugee migration will have on host communities. Prior to the crisis, the November 2014 emergency food security assessment showed that the areas within the Lac Region were food insecure. At the time, 32 per cent of the population was found to be food insecure while the global acute malnutrition rates were above 15 per cent, above the WHO critical threshold.

There has also been an impact on trade flow. Chad had previously exported cattle to Nigeria through the Lac Region and most of this trade had been recently affected by the crisis. The income of livestock keepers in the region has also been affected. Maize farmers who exported their grains to Nigeria are affected as well. The decrease of trade also has had a negative impact on Kanem and Bar El Ghazal’s regions, which had the highest level of food insecurity in Chad.

She added that many of the refugees were currently located in several hard to reach small islands on Lake Chad. In the coming weeks, the Government and humanitarian partners plan to relocate them on a voluntary basis to areas where they can be reached.

UN health agency to hold special weekend session on Ebola; warns against donor fatigue

23 January - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) announced today that it will hold a special meeting on Ebola on Sunday as one of its top officials noted that the outbreak is “still an incredibly dangerous situation” and warned against “a false sense of security” generated by the decline in new cases.

“There tends to be a false sense of security that this is somehow a controllable disease. There is no such thing as Ebola control, it has got to drive to zero," Dr. Bruce Aylward, WHO Assistant Director-General in charge of the Ebola operational response, told reporters at a press conference in Geneva.

"It's still an incredibly dangerous situation," Dr. Aylward said.

Dr. Aylward, who had just returned from West Africa, said he was concerned about whether UN Member States will maintain their incredible generosity, as progress in battling the disease would depend on “funding and people” before the rainy season hits the region.

The biggest risk to get to zero is not complacency and not fatigue among the countries battling to eradicate the disease, according to Dr. Alyward, but the funding gap. “The issue is financial resources and people.”

Earlier this week at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the United Nations launched an appeal for the $1 billion needed for the first six months of 2015 in order to sustain the momentum to stamp out Ebola in the three worst-affected countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone where 21,797 people have been affected with 8,675 deaths.

In Geneva today, WHO announced that its Executive Board would hold a special session on Ebola on Sunday, 25 January.

The morning session will include opening remarks by WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan and an intervention by David Nabarro, UN Special Envoy on Ebola, as well as a survivor of the Ebola virus from Sierra Leone, according to WHO spokesperson, Fadéla Chaib.

The afternoon session will focus on the response of the international community and WHO to the Ebola outbreak, and on how to improve that response for future situations, Ms. Chaib said. The discussions may continue until 9 p.m. Sunday and a set of recommendations and conclusions would be presented, she said.

The UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) reported from the field today that community resistance
towards safe burials and general suspicion of burial teams continues in many parts of the Liberia, and that UNMEER and partners are engaging more with local communities to enhance awareness.

Also in Liberia, the World Food Programme (WFP), in coordination with the Government of Liberia, UNMEER and UNICEF, will be supporting re-opening of schools starting in February, the UN response team reported.

And WHO also reporters that Ebola virus control teams need a mix of expertise, including epidemiologists, logistics specialists, laboratory workers, hygiene experts and various other specialized professions.

**In Davos, Ban urges global action in 2015 on development, gender equality, climate change**

**23 January** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged world leaders gathered at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, to maintain their focus on a broad range of climate, development and gender equality issues, warning that as the global community continues to face multiple crises, the new year must be a time for ‘strong commitment’ from international stakeholders.

“2015 is a year of global action,” Mr. Ban declared in the first of a series of remarks delivered earlier today.

“With the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, with a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and a universal and meaningful climate change agreement by December this year in Paris, I think we can set our lives, our world, on course for a better future.”

Mr. Ban is currently in Davos to push the United Nations agenda for 2015 which is set to be a critical year for the Organization and its member States as they confront the imminent deadline for achievement of the landmark Millennium Development Goal (MDG), and work to achieve a meaningful global agreement at the end-of-year Paris climate conference.

In a separate MDG meeting with advocates also held today, the Secretary-General underscored the importance of delineating a credible sustainable development goal strategy to pick up where the MDG’s leave off, adding that Member States would need to devise “very robust, visionary, and ambitious targets” in order to finalize the Millennium targets stated hope of ending poverty.

“The most important priority is that these goals should be people-centred, planet sensitive and climate friendly,” he continued. “People should be at the centre of our vision. That’s what I'm asking you to continue to do,” he told delegates.

Against that backdrop, Mr. Ban also emphasized that future gains would depend on making advances in achieving gender parity as he drew particular attention to the ongoing UN Women-led HeForShe campaign.

“The Millennium Development Goals recognized that gender equality and women’s empowerment are essential to tackling poverty, hunger and other global problems,” he explained.

“HeForShe has signed up fathers who want to raise empowered daughters. Leaders who know their societies will be stronger when there are as many women in parliament and in business as men. And ordinary people who are fed up with violence and discrimination against women – and want to be part of a global force for change.”
UN human rights office urges probe into excessive use of force in DR Congo protests

23 January - The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) today expressed alarm at the apparent excessive use of force by security officers against demonstrators in Democratic Republic of the Congo cities Kinshasa and Goma, and called for “a thorough and independent investigation” into the matter.

“We urge the Government to promptly conduct a thorough and independent investigation into any excessive use of force by law enforcement officials – and in particular the reported use of live ammunition against protestors,” OHCHR spokesperson Rupert Colville told reporters in Geneva today.

“Any use of force during demonstrations must be exceptional and, when used, must be proportional and strictly necessary,” Mr. Colville said. “The intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.”

“We also call on the protestors to refrain from any acts of violence or vandalism,” he said.

Also today, the team of International Envoys for the Great Lakes Region of Africa expressed their deep concern about recent violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where more than 13 people have reportedly been killed and more than 30 injured in the context of several days of anti-Government demonstrations in the capital Kinshasa, and Goma in the eastern part of the country.

The protests, which began on 19 January against the passing of an electoral bill in the lower house of the legislature, had also resulted in the detention of more than 300 individuals across the Democratic Republic of the Congo including prominent members of the opposition and civil society representatives,” Mr. Colville said.

“The electoral bill is now before the Senate and there are fears that its passage may escalate the situation and result in more violence,” he warned.

The team of envoys called on the DRC Government to exercise restraint, condemned any use of force against peaceful, unarmed demonstrators and arbitrary arrests, and noted that all citizens, including demonstrators and their leaders, have a responsibility to pursue political objectives by non-violent means in conformity with relevant national laws.

They also encouraged the Government, the opposition, as well as civil society to avail themselves of the good offices of the UN in facilitating an inclusive and transparent dialogue between all stakeholders as per provisions of relevant Security Council resolutions.

The team of envoys are comprised of: UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Said Djinnit; UN Special Representative for the DRC Martin Kobler; African Union Special Representative for the Great Lakes Boubacar Diarra; European Union Senior Coordinator for the Great Lakes Koen Vervaeke; United States’ Special Envoy for the Great Lakes and the DRC Russell D. Feingold; and Belgium’s Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Frank de Coninck.

The OHCHR also said that State authorities have restricted Internet and mobile text messaging services for more than three days now, not only disrupting communication between individuals but also creating disruption in the conduct of economic activities, like banking.

“We also call on the authorities to promptly release all those who have been detained for exercising their right to peaceful assembly, for expression of their views, for their affiliation with the opposition or for disagreeing with the amendments to the electoral bill,” Mr. Colville said.

“The right to vote in genuine, periodic elections is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political rights,” he added.
UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon yesterday urged maximum restraint on all sides and flagged the readiness of his Special Representative in the DRC, Martin Kobler, to use his good offices to help narrow the gap between the main actors involved.

Mr. Kobler later tweeted that “the freedom of opinion is the basic pillar of democracy. It has to be guaranteed while at the same time handled with responsibility.”

**Ban welcomes ‘reunification’ accord signed among opposing South Sudanese factions**

*23 January* - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the signing of a peace deal between opposition factions in South Sudan, calling for the accord’s immediate implementation, as well as the commitment of the country’s leaders to follow through with ongoing negotiations towards a final agreement to end the year-long conflict.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York, the Secretary-General welcomed the Agreement on the Reunification of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) signed on 21 January by the South Sudanese parties.

“He calls for its immediate implementation, particularly the recommitment of President Salva Kiir and Dr. Riek Machar to respect the cessation of hostilities agreement, and encourages the signatories to resolve the leadership issues of the SPLM,” said the statement.

Political in-fighting between President Kiir and Mr. Machar, his former deputy, started in mid-December 2013 and subsequently turned into a full-fledged conflict that has sent nearly 100,000 civilians fleeing to UNMISS bases around the country. The crisis has uprooted an estimated 1.9 million people and placed more than 7 million at risk of hunger and disease.

Though fighting has continued, an initial ceasefire was agreed on 23 January 2014 between the two sides in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. That deal was reaffirmed in early May. According to media reports, under the deal signed yesterday, the parties agreed to ‘reunify and reconcile’ the three factions within the SPLM.

In his statement, the UN chief reminded the parties that ‘time is running out,’ and urges them to use the opportunity of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Summit, set for later this year, to reach a final agreement on the end to the conflict, including a power-sharing formula and measures to address its root causes and ensure accountability.

**Death toll in Ukraine conflict exceeds 5,000, may be 'considerably higher' – UN**

*23 January* - More than 5,000 people have now been killed since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine in mid-April last year, the United Nations human rights office said today as it expressed fear that the real figure may be 'considerably higher.'

Escalation of hostilities since 13 January has raised the total death toll in the country to at least 5,086 and some 10,948 people have been wounded between mid-April last year and 21 January 2015, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“In just nine days, between 13 and 21 January, at least 262 people were killed due to the hostilities. That is an average of at least 29 people killed per day. This has been the most deadly period since the declaration of a ceasefire on 5 September,” OHCHR spokesman Rupert Colville said at a press conference in Geneva.
In addition to the intense fighting and shelling in the embattled Donetsk region, shelling has also been reported in several towns of Luhansk region.

The killing of civilians when an artillery shell hit a bus stopping for passengers in the Leninskyi district of Donetsk yesterday was the second bus attack, with significant casualties, in the last 10 days. This has brought into 'stark focus' the impact of the ongoing hostilities on civilians.

“We are concerned about the lack of implementation of the 12 provisions of the Minsk Protocol and the continuing presence of foreign fighters in the east, allegedly including servicemen from the Russian Federation, as well as the presence of heavy and sophisticated weaponry in populated areas under the control of armed groups,” Mr. Colville said.

“Civilians held or trapped in these areas are subject to a total lack of respect for human rights and the rule of law,” he added, reminding all parties to the conflict that international humanitarian law prohibits the targeting of civilians and that the principles of military necessity, distinction, proportionality and precaution must be strictly respected.

Mr. Colville also expressed concern over the impact on civilians of the recent decision by the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine to restrict movement in and out of the areas controlled by armed groups. As of 21 January, people travelling to and from these areas need to obtain special passes and provide documents to justify the need to travel.

“These limitations are worrying, especially in light of the escalating hostilities. It adds to concerns created by the Government decision in November 2014 to discontinue providing State services in the territories controlled by armed groups,” he said.

The restrictions are likely have a 'severe effect' on the most vulnerable groups, such as older people, mothers with children and people with disabilities who depend heavily on social benefits.

“We urge Ukrainian authorities to take immediate steps to redress this situation,” Mr. Colville said.

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine transcended what was initially seen as an internal Ukrainian political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country, later reaching full-scale conflict in the east. A cease-fire and peace plan for eastern Ukraine was signed in the Belarussian capital of Minsk on 5 September, but remains fragile. The situation has since continuously deteriorated, with serious consequences for the country’s unity, territorial integrity and stability.

**UN Women launches next phase in ‘HeForShe’ campaign at Davos Forum**

23 January - At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, today, UN Women, the United Nations entity dedicated to achieving women’s empowerment and gender equality, unveiled a new initiative to galvanize the support of global leaders to bring an end to the persisting inequalities faced by women and girls around the world.

At a press conference in the Swiss city, UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson, who launched the HeForShe campaign in September, said this next phase, *HeForShe IMPACT 10X10X10*, will focus on engaging governments, businesses and universities to make concrete commitments to advance women’s empowerment.

“Women share this planet 50/50 and they are underrepresented, their potential astonishingly untapped. We are very excited to be launching IMPACT 10x10x10 to bring the HeForShe into the next phase,” said Ms. Watson alongside UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, as well as several political and business leaders.

In the months following the kick-off of the initiative in September, several Heads of State, along with celebrities and thousands of men from around the world have committed to be champions for the HeForShe campaign. Ms. Watson said: “Everyone from Desmond Tutu to Prince Harry to Hillary Clinton and Yoko Ono has issued their support.”
Best known for playing the leading role of ‘Hermione Granger’ in *Harry Potter* saga, Ms. Watson said: “I’ve had my breath taken away when a fan told me that since watching my speech [in September] she has stopped herself being beaten up by her father. I’ve been stunned by the number of men in my life that have contacted me since my speech to tell me to keep going and that they want to make sure their daughter will still be alive in a world where women have parity, economically and politically.”

To date, more than 200,000 men and boys have signed their commitment to gender equality. HeForShe has reached more than 1.2 billion people on social media. But more can be done.

“Decide what your commitment is, make it public, and then please report back to us on your progress so that we can share you story. We want to support, guide and reinforce your efforts. Impact 10x10x10 is about concrete commitments to change, the visibility of these commitments and the measurability of them too,” declared Ms. Watson.

Joining Ms. Watson at the press conference, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said: “HeForShe has signed up fathers who want to raise empowered daughters; leaders who know their societies will be stronger when there are as many women in parliament and in business as men; and ordinary people who are fed up with violence and discrimination against women – and want to be part of a global force for change.”

Underling the alliances the campaign is building, Mr. Ban said that the partnership involves individuals and corporations, government leaders and activists, celebrities and global citizens.

“Ultimately we need everyone to get involved if we are to turn the tide,” said UN Women Executive Director and Under-Secretary-General Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

“The HeForShe IMPACT Initiative puts responsibility for change right where it matters- and spotlights leaders who can make it happen. The founding Champions from industry and Government will pave the way for others to join in, using the pilot initiatives to streamline decision-making on relevant and successful activities,” the Executive Director said.

The World Economic Forum’s *Global Gender Gap Report 2014* highlights a large current gap between men and women in terms of political engagement and opportunity and little improvement in equality for women in the workplace since 2006. Universities join the impact trio because youth engagement represents one of the greatest opportunities for accelerating progress toward the achievement of gender equality, and ending violence against women.

At the launch, global leaders who will serve as IMPACT 10X10X10 founding Champions were announced. They will steer the initiative and lead in mobilizing their communities and include: Prime Minister of the Netherlands; President of Sierra Leone; Prime Minister of Sweden; CEO and Chairman of Unilever; Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Tupperware Brands Corporation; Chairman of PricewaterhouseCoopers International Ltd. JPMorgan Chase is also a Title Sponsor of the HeForShe campaign.

**El Salvador: UN rights office welcomes ‘ground-breaking’ pardon of woman in abortion case**

23 January - The United Nations human rights office today welcomed the ‘ground-breaking decision’ of the Salvadorian Legislative Assembly to pardon a young women’s 30-year sentence in an abortion case.

Carmen Guadalupe Vásquez Aldana, who suffered a miscarriage at the age of 18 after reportedly being raped, was convicted of aggravated homicide after her crime was reclassified from ‘abortion’ to ‘aggravated homicide’ during her trial. She had already served seven years of her 30-year sentence.

“The pardon was granted on 21 January following a complex judicial review by the Supreme Court of Justice, which also required a majority plenary vote by the Legislative Assembly. Guadalupe had served seven years of her 30 year sentence,” a spokesman for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
Rupert Colville said Ms. Vásquez’s petition was one of 17 cases presented before the Supreme Court in 2014 requesting pardons for women who are imprisoned on similar charges. El Salvador has a complete ban on and criminalizes abortion, even when the woman's life or health is at risk or in cases of rape or incest.

“We are encouraged by the decision to pardon Guadalupe and welcome the steps taken to review each case in line with due process standards,” Mr. Colville said, reminding that several human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies and special procedures, have regularly expressed serious concern about the total ban and criminalization of abortion in El Salvador.

Such a ban has an impact on women's right to be free from discrimination as well as their rights to life and to health among other human rights, he added.

“We hope that other imprisoned women in El Salvador who received similar convictions will be freed and that efforts will be made to reform the legal framework on sexual and reproductive rights in line with the recommendations of numerous human rights bodies.”

**Demolitions, displacements in West Bank ‘must stop immediately,’ urges UN envoy**

23 January - The United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory expressed concern today over the Israeli authorities’ recent spate of demolitions of Palestinian homes in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

“In the past three days, 77 Palestinians, over half of them children, have been made homeless,” said James Rawley in a statement from Jerusalem.

“Some of the demolished structures were provided by the international community to support vulnerable families. Demolitions that result in forced evictions and displacement run counter to Israel’s obligations under international law and create unnecessary suffering and tension. They must stop immediately,” added Mr. Rawley, who is also UN Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

Since 20 January, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recorded the Israeli authorities’ demolition of 42 Palestinian-owned structures in the Ramallah, Jerusalem, Jericho and Hebron governorates.

In addition to those displaced, 59 Palestinians were otherwise affected, mainly due to the demolition of structures essential for their livelihood, mostly animal shelters. At least eight of these structures were funded by international donors.

In 2014, according to OCHA figures, the Israeli authorities destroyed 590 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and East Jerusalem, displacing 1,177 people – the highest level of displacement in the West Bank since OCHA began systematically monitoring the issue in 2008.

The planning policies applied by Israel in Area C and East Jerusalem discriminate against Palestinians, making it extremely difficult for them to obtain building permits, said Coordinator’s office.

As a result, many Palestinians build without permits to meet their housing needs and risk having their structures demolished. Palestinians must have the opportunity to participate in a fair and equitable planning system that ensures their needs are met.
UN allocates $100 million from emergency fund to bolster relief efforts in Syria, other poorly-funded crises

23 January - Poorly-funded United Nations aid operations received a boost today when Valerie Amos, the UN’s humanitarian chief, announced the allocation of $100 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to boost relief work in twelve countries in need.

The vast majority of the money – some $77.5 million – will be directed towards countries affected by the Syria crisis. Syria itself will receive the largest single allocation, at $30 million, with the number of people there who need humanitarian assistance snowballing from one million four years ago to over 12 million today.

The remainder is to be spread between Lebanon, which receives $18 million, Jordan and Turkey, receiving $9 million each, Iraq, which is allocated $8 million, and Egypt, where $3.5 million will be channelled.

“Despite critical funding gaps, humanitarian workers remain committed to helping every vulnerable Syrian they can,” said Ms. Amos, the UN’s Emergency Relief Coordinator. “This allocation from CERF will help ensure that they can continue their life-saving work.”

The $100 million allocation is the first of two rounds of emergency humanitarian funding planned for release during 2015 with more directed towards support of relief efforts in countries where needs are high but financial support is low.

Grants from CERF’s underfunded-emergencies window provide a temporary lifeline for people caught in crises where current donor contributions fall short but needs are extreme and major assistance is required.

The long-running conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continues to have disastrous effects and $14 million is allotted to supporting aid operations in DRC, which will receive the bulk of money at $9 million, with Burundi and Rwanda each receiving $2.5 million to provide urgent assistance for people displaced by violence and the vulnerable communities that host them.

Humanitarian partners in Colombia, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and Djibouti are also due to receive support to sustain long-standing, but critically underfunded humanitarian operations, including the delivery of food and basic health services.

“We thank our donors who have already pledged $418 million for CERF in 2015. This underfunded emergencies allocation of $100 million from that pool will help millions of people who are caught in crises where the scale of needs has outpaced contributions,” said Ms. Amos.

When CERF was established in 2006, global humanitarian appeals sought $6 billion. That amount has more than tripled to $19 billion. To help humanitarian partners keep pace, in both 2013 and 2014, the Fund allocated more than $175 million through its underfunded-emergencies window.

CERF also provides rapid response funding for new or rapidly deteriorating emergencies and has allocated more than $3.7 billion for humanitarian agencies operating in 88 countries and territories since its inception.
UN agency boosts food assistance to flood-hit Malawi

UN Daily News             23 January 2015

23 January - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced today that it has begun distributing high-energy biscuits in Malawi following the devastating flooding that displaced more than 100,000 people and reportedly killed at least 50 others in recent weeks.

Some 77 metric tons of biscuits – enough to feed 77,000 people – were airlifted into the Southern Africa country from the UN Humanitarian Response Depot in Dubai earlier this week, according to a WFP press release, which added that this ready-to-eat food would be prioritized for the most vulnerable people, particularly youths.

Among the poorest countries on earth, Malawi has one of the highest rates of stunting among children.

Meanwhile, the latest figures from the country’s Government-led food security cluster indicate that some 370,000 people currently require urgent food and other relief assistance due to the flooding.

The UN agency explained that reaching the worst-affected areas with such assistance had become “extremely difficult” as many roads and bridges had been damaged or washed away.

Within days of the President of Malawi declaring a disaster in 15 of the country’s 28 districts, WFP began to deliver maize, beans, oil and super-cereal – a fortified corn blend – from in-country stocks to those displaced in Chikwawa district of Malawi on Saturday. However, the agency has stressed that the stocks will need to be replaced once the crisis is over.

In addition, the WFP warned that $18 million in urgent funding is still required in order for it to be able to continue its assistance to Malawi’s flood victims.

UN chief voices deep concern over Yemen crisis as country's leadership resigns

23 January - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has voiced serious concern about developments in Yemen following the resignation of the country's President and Prime Minister amid a takeover of the capital by Houthi militants.

According to a statement released by Mr. Ban's spokesperson late yesterday evening, the Secretary-General urged all sides to remain “fully engaged” with his Special Adviser on Yemen, Jamal Benomar, who is currently in the capital of Sana'a and is consulting “closely” with stakeholders “to help find a way forward from the current crisis.”

The situation in Yemen has steadily deteriorated in recent days as Government forces engaged in intense fighting with rebel groups throughout the capital.

Following the shelling of the Presidential palace and reported attacks on the Prime Minister's residence, both President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and Prime Minister Khaled Bahah submitted their resignations on 22 January.

“In these uncertain times in the country, the Secretary-General calls on all sides to exercise maximum restraint and maintain peace and stability,” the statement continued.

Earlier this week, the Security Council also voiced concerns over the situation in Yemen and similarly called on all sides to engage with Mr. Benomar who, the Council said, remained well placed to support parties' efforts to resolve their differences peacefully.
Central African Republic: UN launches appeal for refugees amid ongoing conflict

23 January - The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) has launched its latest appeal for funding as it continues working to help more than 450,000 Central African Republic refugees struggling to survive across the region, an agency spokesperson said today.

Addressing a press briefing at the UN Office in Geneva, Karin de Gruijl explained that the $331 million appeal presented by UNHCR and 18 partners would seek to provide safety, food, clean water, shelter, health and other basic services to a potential 460,000 people which the agency expects will be seeking refuge in Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Republic of the Congo by the end of the year.

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

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

With nearly 10 per cent of the Central African Republic’s population of 4.5 million currently living in exile, UNHCR fears that the number of refugees fleeing the country’s conflict may reach as high as 460,000 by year’s end or even surpass that estimated number.

“UNHCR is extremely concerned that violence in the Central African Republic will continue and that the number of people forced to flee their homes will grow,” Ms. de Gruijl told reporters.

She noted that recent violence in the CAR’s Kouango district, some 300 kilometres from the capital of Bangui, had reportedly send thousands of refugees fleeing into the most remote areas of the DRC’s Equateur province.

“Refugees who manage to cross into the DRC are telling us stories of their villages being burnt, violence and murder,” she continued. “Some refugees arrive wounded including with bullet wounds.”

Ms. de Gruijl confirmed that an emergency evaluation team had just returned from the banks of the Oubangui River in the DRC, where many refugees had settled, and was “working on a plan to relocate the refugees away from the border, so that they are safer and can receive humanitarian assistance.” Nonetheless, she added, the bulk of refugees fleeing the CAR had fled west to Cameroon and north to Chad.

The CAR appeal comes as UNHCR’s financial needs have more than doubled in the previous five years. Despite this, the agency receives only a small annual contribution from the UN regular budget. Its programmes are almost entirely funded by voluntary contributions from Government and private donors.

Over 2014, the $3.19 billion in contributions that UNHCR has received is less than half the amount needed, meaning that although the organization can cover the most basic needs such as water, sanitation, health and rudimentary shelter, important long-term activities such as vocational skills training, promoting livelihood activities or secondary education remain often underfunded.
UN pays tribute to late Saudi King's role in advancing development, humanitarian causes

23 January - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has “learnt with sadness” of the death of King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the late King of Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, who passed away yesterday at the age of 90.

In a statement issued through his spokesperson late yesterday evening, Mr. Ban extended his condolences to the bereaved family of King Abdullah and the Government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia while also highlighting the “major contributions” the late King made to the development of his country.

“Under his leadership over many decades in different high-level positions in Government, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia achieved remarkable progress and prosperity for its people,” the statement declared, adding that Mr. Ban paid tribute to King Abdullah's efforts in addressing both regional and international challenges and in promoting dialogue among the world's faiths.

“As the driving force behind the Arab Peace Initiative, King Abdullah left a tangible legacy that can still point the way toward peace in the Middle East,” Mr. Ban said through his spokesperson. “King Abdullah's leadership will be remembered throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds and the international community.”

In addition, the Secretary-General also expressed gratitude for the King's “generous humanitarian and developmental support” for people across the Arab region and wider world.

In a separate statement issued earlier today, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP), in fact, recalled that in 2008, Saudi Arabia, under King Abdullah's leadership, responded swiftly to peaking global food prices with a $500 million contribution – the largest single donation that the UN agency has ever received from a donor country.

“He was a true humanitarian leader, always on the side of the world's hungry poor,” WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin said. “When we struggled to save lives and to feed people fleeing from conflict or natural disasters, we could always count on the King's generosity at the most difficult moments.”

Moreover, the WFP noted, King Abdullah had also stood by the people of Iraq with a $500 million contribution to UN relief efforts for displaced Iraqis fleeing the conflict in their country. When WFP struggled to meet the food needs of Syrian refugees due to a shortage of funding, the agency added, the King made a new contribution of a total of $104 million to help humanitarian efforts.

“King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud worked tirelessly to improve the lives of his people and people suffering far from his homeland. The world, and especially, the people he helped will never forget his life-saving support,” Ms. Cousin continued.

“On behalf of WFP staff and the millions of people he helped us serve around the world, we express our deep condolences to the Saudi people at the loss of a true, outstanding world leader.”