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Iraq: UN health agency seeks $60 million to keep critical health centres open in conflict areas

23 June - With temperatures soaring to over 120 degrees Fahrenheit in some parts of Iraq and the number of people fleeing violence topping 3 million, the World Health Organization fears the closing of nearly 90 per cent of the health centres in conflict-affected areas unless donors respond to an urgent appeal to ensure their continuing operation.

WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier said his agency urgently needs $60 million to ensure the continuing operation of 77 health centres in Iraq, including 12 mobile clinics, which are on the verge of closing this month.

The 77 health facilities represent 88 per cent of current health projects in conflict-affected areas in the country, Mr. Lindmeier said at the UN press briefing in Geneva, Switzerland.

He also said that temperatures in Iraq were soaring, topping 120 degrees in some locations.

“That situation,” the spokesperson said, “coupled with poor access to healthcare and the 3 million internally displaced people who were forced to live in tents, there had been a rise in disease, namely dehydration and diarrhoea.”

WHO was appealing desperately to provide life-saving medicines, Mr. Lindmeier said.

Meanwhile, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) announced that the number of Iraqis who have been...
displaced now stood at 3,087,372 and were found across all of Iraq’s 18 governorates.

IOM spokesperson Joel Millman said the majority fled violence from the three governorates of Anbar (1.2 million), Ninewa (just over 1 million) and Salah al-Din (almost half a million).

Of the total displaced population, he said, 55 per cent were displaced after 15 May when Ramadi city, in the Anbar governorate, was entirely occupied by armed groups.

**UN Libya envoy meets with armed groups in support of political agreement**

**23 June** - As part of an overall United nations-supported effort on the security track of Libya’s national dialogue, the United Nations envoy for country has met in Misrata with representatives of armed groups, stressing the importance of local ceasefires and reconciliation agreements are welcome developments.

“The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has repeatedly emphasized the importance of security and military officials from the conflicting sides engaging in dialogue,” said Bernardino León in a press release issued yesterday by the Mission.

The discussion is part of the overall UNSMIL efforts on the security track of the Libyan dialogue, which is complementary to the ongoing political discussions and critical for the success of the process.

In this context, UNSMIL is in contact with the various security and military actors on the ground in different areas of the country. Yesterday’s meeting was with armed groups from Misrata, the Western Mountain and other areas of western Libya.

It will be followed by similar gatherings in other regions, including Zintan. Also, a meeting is being prepared in Cairo, Egypt, in the coming days with representatives of the Libyan Army and armed groups from regions in the east.

“The cooperation of the armed groups is crucial for restoring peace and stability to Libya,” said Mr. León in Misrata, attended by representatives of the Municipal Council. He expressed the hope of convening the security track of the dialogue soon to draw a detailed plan for the implementation of the security arrangements and address security-related issues.

Giving an overview of the draft political agreement to end Libya's conflict, the UNSMIL chief underscored the importance of the support of the armed groups for successful implementation, including their withdrawal from cities and towns.

In that regard, he added, recent local ceasefires and reconciliation agreements reached between localities in western Libya are welcome developments that “the Libyan actors should build on with a view to achieving a permanent and sustainable truce.”

During the meetings, the participants expressed their views regarding the way forward, voiced their concerns and discussed how to overcome them. There was agreement among them to hold a wider meeting soon to discuss mechanisms to consolidate the ceasefires and strengthen it by applying a number of confidence-building measures, such as the exchange of prisoners.
On International Day, UN reminds world of invisible plight of millions of widows and their children

23 June - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is urging the world on the fifth International Widows’ Day “to assert the rights of those whose bereavement is followed by exclusion, abuse or the loss of homes, livelihoods and social standing.”

In his message on the Day, Mr. Ban said the death of their partner can leave widows in precarious living conditions, particularly in areas of conflict, natural disaster and humanitarian crisis.

“In societies that view women as whole only when they are married, widows are often disregarded or stigmatized,” he said. “Without the economic and social protection of their husbands, many widows are treated as financial burdens by their families. They may lose their rights to inheritance and property, or even be forced out of their communities.”

The UN General Assembly declared 23 June International Widows’ Day to give special attention to the millions of widows and their children around the world who are “absent in statistics, unnoticed by researchers, neglected by national and local authorities and mostly overlooked by civil society organizations.”

“On International Widows’ Day, we reassert the equality of men and women,” the UN Secretary-General said, adding that “the United Nations is working on specific measures that can help widows.”

“We must erase the social stigmatization and economic deprivation that confronts widows; eliminate their high risk of sexual abuse and exploitation; and remove the barriers to resources and economic opportunities that constrain their future,” he said. “We also must advance widows’ equal rights to inheritance, property, land and other assets.”

“This will be an essential element in realizing our vision of a life of dignity for all,” he said.

According to a UN fact sheet on the state of the world’s widows, “vast numbers of women are widowed due to armed conflict. In some parts of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, for instance, it is reported that around 50 per cent of women are widows, while there are an estimated three million widows in Iraq and over 70,000 in Kabul, Afghanistan.

In addition, it said that “in many countries, widowhood is stigmatized and seen as a source of shame. Widows are thought to be cursed in some cultures and are even associated with witchcraft. Such misconceptions can lead to widows being ostracized, abused and worse.”
UN rights expert deplores ‘profound failure of diplomacy’ as Syria conflict escalates

23 June - Syria’s “ever-accelerating” cycle of violence continues to reap civilian casualties and provoke “unspeakable suffering”, the head of a United Nations-mandated Commission of Inquiry warned today, as he lamented the international community’s inability to bring the country’s four-year war to a close.

“The continuing war represents a profound failure of diplomacy,” Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro told the Human Rights Council in Geneva earlier this morning. “Influential States have acted with equivocation in their efforts to extinguish the conflict in Syria. While upholding the need for a political solution, some have deepened their military involvement, accentuating the internationalisation of the conflict.”

Mr. Pinheiro’s remarks come as the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, which he chairs, released its latest paper on the situation on the ground in the Middle Eastern country noting that amid Government bombardments and the violence inflicted by armed groups, Syrian civilians were leading an increasingly precarious existence.

“With each passing day there are fewer safe places in Syria, as evidenced by the mass displacement of civilians within and out of the country,” the UN expert continued. “Indiscriminate attacks on civilian-inhabited areas are committed across the country by most, if not all, of the warring parties.”

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the situation in Syria is increasingly gloomy as critical relief efforts stutter, impeded by the fighting, shifting frontlines and the rise of extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Jabhat Al-Nusra, and Jaysh Al-Islam.

In its latest situation report, OCHA warned that some 12 million people in the Middle Eastern country today remain in need of humanitarian assistance – a twelve-fold increase since 2011. The figures include 5.6 million children. Meanwhile, 7.6 million people have been displaced by the conflict and another 4.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in hard to reach and besieged locations.

The humanitarian impact of the crisis is only further compounded by the grim human toll which, as of today, counts over 200,000 people killed and over one million injured since hostilities began.

Spotlighting the events on the ground, Mr. Pinheiro also pointed to the Syrian Government’s siege of the Yarmouk camp in Damascus where thousands of Palestinian refugees, including children, remain trapped, resulting in “civilians starving to death, or dying from chronic illness or injuries sustained in aerial bombardments for which there is little or no medical care available.”

“The absence of decisive action by the community of States, as a whole, has nourished a now deeply entrenched culture of impunity,” he added. “A war in which civilians are systematically killed, opponents are silenced, and communities are pitted against one another, requires more than compassion to resolve.”

“The Syrian people deserve an unambiguous commitment to helping them to return their country to peace. To create conditions amenable to negotiations is a shared responsibility,” Mr. Pinheiro concluded.

“This cannot be achieved without the setting aside of the narrow national interests of a few and the coming together of a community which holds within itself not only the ideals of human rights, but also a deepening realisation that, without peace and justice in Syria, all the world will suffer the consequences.”
Millions of children will fall behind unless new UN development goals focus on most in need – UNICEF

23 June - The global community will fail millions of children if it does not focus on the most disadvantaged, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) warns in its final report on achievement of the child-related UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), emphasizing that “we were not ambitious enough” to reach those with the greatest needs.

“As the global community comes together around the sustainable development goals [SDGs], we should set our sights first on reaching the children left behind as we pursued the MDGs,” UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake writes in the foreword of the report Progress for Children: Beyond Averages, the agency’s final report on the child-related MDGs released late yesterday evening.

The report concludes that despite significant achievements, unequal opportunities have left millions of children living in poverty, dying before they turn five, without schooling and suffering chronic malnutrition. Indeed, UNICEF warns that progress still eludes the nearly 6 million children who die every year before their fifth birthday, the 289,000 women who die every year while giving birth and the 58 million children who don’t go to primary school.

“The MDGs helped the world realize tremendous progress for children – but they also showed us how many children we are leaving behind,” Mr. Lake said press release on the report. “The lives and futures of the most disadvantaged children matter – not only for their own sake, but for the sake of their families, their communities and their societies.”

Mr. Lake also noted in the report that “in setting broad global goals the MDGs inadvertently encouraged nations to measure progress through national averages. In the rush to make that progress, many focused on the easiest-to-reach children and communities, not those in greatest need. In doing so, national progress may actually have been slowed.”

“The problem is not that we were too ambitious,” he said. “It is that we were not ambitious enough.”

UNICEF said that at current rates of progress continued failure to reach these children can have dramatic consequences and listed the following:

- 68 million more children under five will die from mostly preventable causes by 2030;
- An estimated 119 million children will still be chronically malnourished in 2030;
- Half a billion people will still be defecating in the open, posing serious risks to children's health in 2030;
- It will take almost 100 years for all girls from sub-Saharan Africa’s poorest families to complete their lower secondary education.

The report also highlights notable successes since 1990 such as the drop in under-five mortality by more than half, from 90 per 1,000 live births to 43 per 1,000 live births; the decrease in underweight and chronic malnutrition among children under five by 42 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively; as well as the decline maternal mortality by 45 per cent.

The landmark Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed 15 years ago and while there has been significant progress in meeting the targets challenges persist. With the deadline of the MDGs set for the end of this year, UN Member States are crafting a new set of targets, now known as sustainable development goals (SDGs).

This new agenda will aim to address a raft lingering and emerging challenges, such as the fact that globally, 73 million young people are looking for work and many more are trapped in exploitative jobs. The new global sustainability agenda is expected to be approved by world leaders at special summit ahead of the annual high-level segment of the General Assembly this coming September.
“The SDGs present an opportunity to apply the lessons we have learned and reach the children in greatest need – and shame on us if we don’t,” Mr. Lake said “For greater equity in opportunity for today’s children means less inequality and more global progress tomorrow.”

**Sustainable soil management key to curbing climate change and ensuring food security – UN agency**

23 June - Mountain soils are of great importance to ecosystem and food security, according to a newly released United Nations-backed publication, which also highlights technical insights and human activities of sustainable soil management approach with special attention to mountain peoples.

"Mountain soils are particularly susceptible to climate change, deforestation, unsustainable farming practices and resource extraction methods that affect their fertility, trigger land degradation, desertification and disasters … leading to poverty," Jose Graziano da Silva, Director-General of The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), writes in the preface to the volume.

As a contribution to the 2015 International Year of Soils, the book, Understanding Mountain Soils, aims to raise global awareness of the importance of mountain soils, the need for their sustainable management and the harsh reality faced by the often-marginalized mountain peoples.

Citing environmental, economic and social values of mountain soils, the new publication showcases solutions, techniques and best practices worldwide of the sustainable soil management approach for protecting ecosystem.

Indigenous practices and local knowledge, highlights the book, are the backbones for essential ecosystem functions. Contouring, terracing and mixed farming are some good examples of landscape approach developed by mountain peoples to manage their lands sustainably.

However, threats and challenges, caused by both climate change and human actions, remain for the fragile mountain soils.

The book therefore calls for global efforts to empower mountain farmers and indigenous people, support rural women as well as a landscape approach for better safeguard.

‘Understanding Mountain Soils’ was launched at the beginning of annual meeting of the Global Soils Partnership, which took place in Rome on 22 June and runs through 24 June.

International Year of Soils 2015 aims to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of soil for food security and essential ecosystem functions.
Europe must uphold values of human rights, democracy, UN chief says in Strasbourg visit

23 June - As global challenges proliferate from Yemen to South Sudan and beyond, the United Nations and Europe must unite in the fight to defend democracy and international solidarity, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared today in a sweeping address that touched on issues ranging from the rise of violent extremism to the threat of climate change.

“The UN is doing everything it can to save lives and bring peace wherever possible. It is working to ensure accountability for all,” the Secretary-General affirmed in remarks delivered to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg earlier this morning. “The crimes that are shocking our consciences will not go unpunished.”

However, continued Mr. Ban, Europe’s active participation in defending the rights of civil society, relieving the pressures of the global migration crisis, confronting the virulent spread of violent extremism, and working for a sustainable future for all, was needed now more than ever.

“For this reason, I urge you to reinforce your partnership with the United Nations,” he added.

While democracy is on the rise globally, the UN chief noted, democratic institutions in many parts of the world are nonetheless being eroded as judicial independence and press freedom come under attack. In many instances, he said, space for civil society – a lynchpin of many modern European democracies – is disappearing: more than 50 countries, including in Europe, have passed nearly 100 laws restricting the operations and funding of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

“We must raise our voices against those who block non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders,” the Secretary-General told the gathered delegates. “I urge the Council of Europe to join me in calling for an end to this curbing of essential freedoms.”

At the same time, Mr. Ban spotlighted the equally critical role played by NGOs, independent media, and human rights defenders in tempering the advance of another looming threat: violent extremism.

“Crimes in the name of religion are crimes against religion,” he stated. “We stand with Europe as it struggles to combat a rise in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim attacks and discrimination.”

Tensions in Europe related to violent extremism and religious discrimination have been on the rise in recent months, particularly since the 7 January attack by Islamist extremists against the editorial offices of French magazine Charlie Hebdo, which resulted in the deaths of 11 people, including the magazine’s cartoonists and editor.

The attackers then engaged police officers before proceeding with two subsequent hostage takings at a Jewish supermarket in Paris, and a print shop northeast of the French capital. Ultimately, 17 people were killed.

Amid the growing sectarian tensions in Europe and across the world, the Secretary-General explained that in November he would unveil a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism to the UN General Assembly in an effort “to reinforce international unity around the shared principles that violent extremists seek to undermine.”

Against that backdrop, he welcomed the Council of Europe’s efforts to address the issue and how radicalization can lead to terrorism as well as the European body’s adoption of a Political Declaration, Action Plan and the Additional Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism.

Mr. Ban also drew attention to the burgeoning migration crisis that is bringing irregular migrants to Europe’s shores in
record numbers.

Sea crossings from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe have surged, with the most recent official figures showing that as of 8 June a total of 103,000 refugees and migrants had arrived in Europe: 54,000 in Italy, 48,000 in Greece, 91 on Malta and 920 in Spain. This includes record numbers of refugees landing daily in the Greek islands. Meanwhile, the overall forced displacement numbers in Europe for the 2014 reporting period totalled an overwhelming 6.7 million.

The Secretary-General observed that while poverty and poor governance as well as conflict and persecution were pushing migrants and refugees towards Europe, Europe itself would need to “lead in global solidarity” and promote legal channels of migration, including resettlement, family reunification and work and study visas.

“I call on this Council to help those who look to Europe for protection from tyranny, lawlessness and deprivation,” he concluded. “We must reject anti-migrant rhetoric and recognize migrants’ positive contributions to your societies.”

The Secretary-General’s visit to Strasbourg also saw the UN chief meet with a number of high-level European officials, including Igor Crnadak, Foreign Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary-General of the Council of Europe as well as Anne Brasseur, President of Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe.

In his meetings, Mr. Ban underlined the UN’s objectives towards achieving a roadmap for a sustainable future and called for greater international unity as the Organization barrels towards the creation of a new development agenda and a revolutionary climate agreement scheduled to be reached in Paris in December.

### At least 3,000 suspected Dengue fever cases reported in Yemen – UN health agency

23 June - Thousands of suspected cases of the mosquito-borne viral infection Dengue fever have been reported in conflict-ravaged Yemen, where a major health crisis is unfolding, the United Nations World Health Organization announced today.

WHO spokesman Christian Lindmeier told reporters at UN headquarters in Geneva that more than 3,000 suspected cases of Dengue had been reported in Yemen since March 20 with some non-governmental organizations flagging more than 6,000 cases.

The latest development comes just days after WHO said Yemen’s health system is on the verge of breakdown. Hospitals have been destroyed, health workers killed and critical shortages of food, medical supplies and fuel are causing large-scale suffering, and it is only thanks to the heroic efforts of the country’s health workers, the resilience of its brave people and the tireless efforts of national and international humanitarian organizations that any semblance of health care is being provided.

In addition, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report that health kits, IV fluids and other essential medicines have been delivered to health facilities in four governorates in Yemen in the past week, for the treatment of more than 438,000 people, including treatment of patients with dengue fever.

In Geneva today, the WHO spokesman said that Dengue fever in Yemen followed a seasonal pattern with a high number of cases being reported between April and August annually, but the conflict had led to a large increase in the number of cases reported this year.

The current crisis in Yemen had severely impacted access to water, sanitation, preventive and clinical services, and shelter in many governorates that has led to an increased risk of disease outbreaks, particularly among the internally displaced people and the large segments of the population affected by the crisis, according to Mr. Lindmeier.

“Hundreds of cases were expected in Aden alone in the coming weeks,” he said.
He also said that access to care had been severely impacted with a nearly 50 percent drop in consultations since the conflict began in 2015.

WHO said that together with Yemen’s Ministry of Health, they have developed an outbreak control and response strategy for the suspected Dengue cases, which included measures such as strengthened laboratory capacity, the provision of bed nets, insecticide and spraying equipment, and transportation and implementation.

However, “access was the biggest challenge,” Mr. Lindmeier said.

Dengue fever is a severe, flu-like illness that affects infants, young children and adults, but seldom causes death, according to a WHO factsheet, which also says there is no specific treatment for dengue fever but early detection and access to proper medical care lowers fatality rates below 1 per cent.

**Nepal: senior UN development official pledges support ahead of post-quake reconstruction conference**

23 June - Two months after a massive earthquake and several powerful aftershocks ravaged Nepal, the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, Haoliang Xu, arrived in Kathmandu for a visit will include participation in an International Donors’ Conference aimed at bolstering the country’s post-disaster reconstruction efforts.

Deliberations for the 25 June conference entitled *Toward a Resilient Nepal*, will be informed by a post-disaster needs assessment that was conducted by the Nepalese Government with support from UNDP and other development partners.

“The challenge of rebuilding the areas affected by earthquakes is enormous, and UNDP will continue to provide the government of Nepal with assistance in establishing the implementation arrangements and financial systems necessary to build a resilient Nepal,” Mr. Xu said after his arrival in the Nepalese’s capital yesterday.

UNDP is assisting the Government of Nepal to respond to and recover from the earthquakes that devastated the country in April and May. As part of a four-day visit, Mr. Xu will also travel into the hard-hit Sindhupalchowk district to see the destruction first hand.

Speaking with local officials, community members and humanitarian actors, the Director will discuss UNDP’s work and reaffirm the agency’s commitment to long-term recovery assistance – with a special focus on protecting the poorest and most vulnerable people.

With a comprehensive programme spanning three years, UNDP will focus on three main areas of work: revitalizing livelihoods and economic recovery of communities; restoring local governance systems and public service delivery; and helping to build a disaster-resilient Nepal under the leadership of the Government.
Ban hails creation of International Day against Sexual Violence in Conflict

23 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has welcomed the United Nations General Assembly’s decision to establish 19 June as the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, a spokesperson for the Organization announced today.

In a statement issued today, the UN spokesperson’s office said the Secretary-General commended Member States in passing the resolution “for the increasing priority given to conflict related sexual violence.”

“The international community must not rest until all violence against women and girls is eliminated, and women’s full political and economic participation worldwide is ensured,” the statement continued. “These are critical for upholding human rights, as well as achieving sustainable development and peace.”

The International Day – which was established by a consensus resolution adopted in the Assembly last week, will now be observed annually – will aim to raise awareness of the need to end conflict-related sexual violence and urge the international community to stand in solidarity with the survivors of sexual violence around the world – two of the Secretary-General’s priorities, according to his spokesperson.

The new initiative, moreover, comes amid an uptick in reports from areas controlled by militant groups aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) of brutal acts of sexual violence against women and girls. Just last year, ISIL affiliate Boko Haram abducted some 276 girls their school in Chibok, located in Nigeria’s restive north-eastern Borno state, as the militant group ramped up brutal attacks targeting the African country’s children.

The date 19 June commemorates the breakthrough adoption in 2008 of UN Security Council resolution 1820, which recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war and a threat to global peace and security, requiring an operational security, justice and service response. It further recognized that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity and/or constitutive acts of genocide.

UN deputy chief urges ramped-up support for global peacebuilding efforts

23 June - The international community must boost material and financial support for peacebuilding initiatives in order to better help countries emerging from conflict build a sustainable and peaceful future, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said today.

Addressing the opening of the Second Annual Session of the Peacebuilding Commission at UN Headquarters in New York, the Deputy Secretary-General emphasized the role of peacebuilding at “the core of UN activities in conflict-affected countries” but warned that financing efforts for peacebuilding still remained woefully insufficient.

“We do not know exactly how large the financing gap for peacebuilding is, since there are no global estimates of peacebuilding needs. But there are clear indications that allocations to peacebuilding and to institution-building – which is closely related – in conflict-affected countries are grossly inadequate,” Mr. Eliasson confirmed.
The UN deputy head told those gathered that in a group of 31 conflict-affected countries, critical institution-building in the political, security and justice areas received less than 10 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) during the period 2002-2013. For the six countries on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission Burundi (Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Central African Republic), only 7 per cent of ODA was allocated to these areas.

“This shortfall affects our ability to build and consolidate peace with short term and targeted support to national processes and plans,” he continued.

In addition to the funding shortfalls, Mr. Eliasson pointed out that existing funding mechanisms among donors remained “fragmented” as development, security, human rights and humanitarian activities are often funded from different budgets with separate decision-making processes.

On the recipient side, the funding mechanisms remain equally scattered across separate funds and “a multitude of plans and strategies on the part of governments, the UN system and other actors on the ground” which, he added, “do not contribute to coherence and a clear focus.”

One option to countering such a piecemeal approach would be to enhance the UN Peacebuilding Fund, Mr. Eliasson said, citing the global pooled fund which had already played “a positive role in breaking down the silos” among UN missions and country teams in areas such as the Central African Republic.

However, compounding the problem related to fragmentation, the Deputy Secretary-General also noted the lack of robust tax and rule of law institutions in many countries emerging from conflict, cautioning that this only added to the burden facing an effective mobilization of domestic resources.

He suggested that this alone made the need for early and sustained investment in capacity building by the international community “even more critical.”

“We need to make sure that the Peacebuilding Fund is placed on a solid footing,” Mr. Eliasson concluded. “The Fund has a valuable role to play as a global pooled fund that brings together the political, security and development aspects of peacebuilding.”

**With all parties now signed onto Mali peace accord, world must back implementation – UN envoy**

23 June - Welcoming the signature last Saturday by all parties to the conflict in Mali of the Accord for Peace and Reconciliation, the top United Nations envoy for the country today told the Security Council that now the implementation phase must start.

“Today we have a global and inclusive agreement, signed by the Government, the Coordination of Movements of Azawad and the Platform [armed groups], and negotiated in less than a year, with the assistance of international mediation and under the auspices of Algeria,” Mongi Hamdi reported as he briefed the Council this morning. “The Peace Accord opens prospects for Mali’s recovery and longer-term perspectives with a view to reversing the setbacks induced by the political and security crisis.”

This agreement lays out the conditions for peace and reconciliation, but several challenges lie ahead, as “reconstruction is a more difficult path than destruction”, stressed Mr. Hamdi, who is the Special Representative and head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

He praised the Government for incorporating the Agreement in the political agenda which was introduced at the National Assembly two weeks ago, calling upon the international community and the financial institutions to support “as soon as possible” the implementation.

Indeed, in spite of notable progress on the political front, the security situation remains fragile, Mr. Hamdi warned. “The
recent violations of the ceasefire agreements and clashes are a stark reminder of the complexity and unpredictability of the security environment in the northern regions,” he stressed.

Nonetheless, he welcomed the withdrawal of the Plateforme from Menaka, where MINUSMA continues to reinforce its presence and support arrangements to ensure the protection of civilians.

“If implemented in a timely, inclusive and consensual fashion by the parties,” the security provisions of the Agreement, which include interim arrangements such as cantonment and DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) and SSR (security sector reform) programmes, could positively impact the Mission’s efforts to stabilise the northern regions, Mr. Hamdi said.

“But the recent spate of violence in some localities in the northern regions has caused massive population displacements. This increased caseload exerts an even heavier burden on the resources of host families, health and education facilities as well as water and sanitation infrastructures.”

With scores of displaced people and refugees returning home in spite of pressing humanitarian needs, it is therefore crucial to quickly re-establish basic social services nationwide, particularly in areas of return, the Special Representatives highlighted.

The task is tremendously complicated by the fact that Northern Mali remains “one of the most difficult environments for peacekeeping.” “Its size, geographical environment, harsh climate and extremely poor or non-existent infrastructure continue to pose significant challenges to the Mission.”

Compounding these challenges, violent extremists and other enemies of peace continue to indiscriminately attack our forces and camps, he explained. Convinced that MINUSMA will be faced with more security and operational challenge “in the immediate future,” Mr. Hamdi told the Council it is critical that troop and police-contributing countries have the capacities and capabilities required to operate safely and effectively.

“As the Security Council initiates discussions on MINUSMA’s mandate renewal, neither the challenges nor the risks at hand should be underestimated. Going forward, it is critical to clearly define the roles of the international community in the implementation of the Accord based on comparative advantage.”

For the Special Representative, a particularly important role for the Mission is supporting security and defence, as well as human rights and justice aspects of the Accord. But the implementation is primarily the Malians’s responsibility, he underscored.

“It is my hope that the future mandate of MINUSMA can be oriented fully behind the peace process including through continued good offices, active ceasefire monitoring.”

MINUSMA’s current mandate is set to expire on June 30.

**First-ever comprehensive online system to counter narcotics launches in Afghanistan**

23 June - As the result of a three-year partnership, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Afghan Government today launched the first-ever interactive online system for all counter-narcotics-related data in the country.

During a ceremony in Kabul, the Afghan Minister of Counter Narcotics, Mr. Salamat Azimi, and UNODC’s regional representative, Mr. Andrey Avetisyan, unveiled the Afghanistan Drug Reporting System. In attendance were high ranking Government officials and the international community.

Following the Government’s announcement of a National Mobilization Against Narcotics...
to mark the upcoming International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, commemorated annually on 26 June, the Ministry called the new system a key component of its leadership and coordination role in countering drugs.

The online tool compiles verified data by sector and location from the nine entities involved in counter-narcotics related initiatives – namely the Afghan Ministries of Justice, Interior, Public Health, Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, and the Attorney General's Office – together with international partners, including the Bureau of International Law Enforcement and UNODC.

Through the system, stakeholders can access the most current data on all available narcotics-related indicators in Afghanistan, including eradication, cultivation, drug price, seizures and imprisonment. With the ability to be used in trend analysis, policy development and evaluation, it becomes a key tool for policy makers, the international community and all those involved in countering narcotics in Afghanistan. There is also scope to expand the system as required going forward.

The reporting system is the latest collaborative document – together with the Annual Opium Survey and the Afghanistan Drug Report – from the research capacity-building partnership between the Afghan Government and UNODC.

**In pivotal year, public servants must rise to the moment – UN chief**

23 June - In a world of enormous social, economic and environmental challenges, public services must be accountable and our public servants fully able to rise to the moment, today said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

“We celebrate the dedication of public servants everywhere and salute their tireless efforts to provide efficient and inclusive services that are available to all,” stated Mr. Ban, marking the United Nations Public Service Day.

Reminding that 2015 is “a year for concerted global action”, he stressed a number of high-level events, such as the conference on financing for development in July in Addis-Abeba, the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in September in New York, and the Paris Conference on Climate Change in December.

“They can all help generate momentum for strengthening leadership in public services,” Mr. Ban underlined.

Against this background of transition, he continued, governments everywhere will need to adopt innovative and integrated approaches to promote policy change, institutional coordination, participatory decision-making, and effective, responsive, inclusive and accountable service delivery.

This year’s United Nations Public Service Awards recognize that innovation and leadership contribute to better and more accountable services to local communities, including marginalized groups that are present at the commemoration of Public Service Day in Medellin, Colombia, where twenty-two public institutions will be recognized for their achievements.

“On this Public Service Day, I thank all public servants for their daily efforts to make a difference. I also call upon young people everywhere to consider dedicating themselves to the noble cause of public service as we strive to build a future of dignity of all,” the Secretary-General concluded.
New UN office opens in Seoul to monitor human rights issues in DPR Korea

23 June - A new UN office to work on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) was opened today in Seoul by the United Nations High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

“Less than 50 miles from here lies another world marked by the utmost repression and deprivation. Tens of thousands of Korean people have escaped that reality, and through hazardous means, reached a new life in the Republic of Korea. But millions remain trapped in the grip of a totalitarian system which not only denies their freedom, but increasingly their basic survival needs,” said Mr. Zeid, while on a three-day official visit to South Korea.

The decision to open an office has been made in accordance with one of the recommendations of the ground-breaking February 2014 report of the independent international Commission of Inquiry on human rights in DPRK.

Positioned at the hub for information, analysis and networking in DPRK, the new field office in Seoul promises to take the response of the UN human rights system to a new level, he said. “The Seoul office will monitor and document [violations] in the DPRK, building on the landmark work of the Commission of Inquiry and Special Rapporteur. We firmly believe this will help lay the basis for future accountability.”

During his visit to Seoul, the High Commissioner is also scheduled to meet President Park Geun-hye, as well as a number of high-level Government and State officials and the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission. He will also meet civil society organisations to discuss the human rights situation in DPRK, as well as in South Korea.