UN health agency launches billion dollar appeal to tackle soaring needs in four crisis-torn countries

24 February - The World Health Organization (WHO) today appealed to donors to provide $1 billion for life-saving health needs ranging from childhood vaccinations to surgical care for the severely wounded for some 25 million people caught up in conflict across the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan and Syria.

The United Nations health agency made that call today, on behalf the entire Health Cluster of humanitarian organizations it coordinates, at a special session at its Geneva headquarters attended by more than 50 donor countries and other Member States.

“This unprecedented number of humanitarian emergencies, combined with the Ebola outbreak response in West Africa, have demonstrated WHO’s ability to respond to major health emergencies,” Dr. Bruce Aylward, Special Representative of the Director-General for Ebola Response and Assistant Director-General for Emergencies said in a news release.

“But the huge stresses they pose also underscore the great needs – and funding gaps – that WHO, and our health partners, from NGOs to sister United Nations agencies, face,” Dr Aylward added.

All four countries for which the appeal was made are classified as so-called “Grade 3” category crises, which require the highest-level of response that the UN can deliver.
In each of the countries – the Central African Republic (CAR), Iraq, South Sudan and Syria – WHO reported that the needs range from basic health care such as childhood vaccinations to surgical care for severely wounded patients caught up in the conflicts.

“In Iraq and CAR, for example, around one-quarter of hospitals, clinics and other health facilities have been damaged in their respective conflicts, or are not functioning,” according to WHO. “The sheer scale of humanitarian needs in 2014, coupled with insufficient funding levels, has stretched the capacity of the entire humanitarian system, including WHO, to the limit.”

Overall, the Health Cluster group of humanitarian organizations needs $1 billion – $322.7 million by WHO and $687 million for its partner agencies – to deliver health services to 25 million people in the major crises, the majority women and children, as follows:

- Central African Republic: 1.4 million people in need of humanitarian health support; with $48 million needed by the health sector;
- Iraq: 4 million people needing humanitarian health support; $218.7 million needed by the health sector;
- South Sudan: 3.3 million people needing humanitarian health support; $90 million required by the health sector;
- Syria: 16.4 million people needing humanitarian health support; $687 million required by the health sector in Syria and neighbouring countries.

WHO and its partners have provided care to millions of people across each country ranging from routine immunization programmes against measles, polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases, delivering medical and health services ranging from surgical care, treating non-communicable diseases like cancers, diabetes, heart and lung diseases, and providing primary health care support to remote and besieged communities.

**South Sudan gripped by ‘serious failure of leadership’ as peace talks stall, warns top UN official**

24 February - Amid a worsening humanitarian situation and a fragile security environment, the continuing tensions between South Sudan’s rival factions risk plunging the country into further violence, the top United Nations peacekeeping official warned today.

“The volatile security environment is a direct illustration of the parties’ continued lack of political will,” UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous told the Security Council in a briefing. “The Government and opposition do not seem to take the political negotiations seriously and appear unwilling to make the necessary compromises.”

The security situation in South Sudan has deteriorated steadily over the past year since political in-fighting between South Sudan’s President Salva Kiir and his former Vice-President, Riek Machar and their respective factions erupted in December 2013. The hostilities subsequently turned into a full-fledged conflict that has sent nearly 100,000 civilians fleeing to bases around the country managed by the UN Missions (UNMISS).

While the crisis has uprooted an estimated 1.9 million people and placed more than 7 million at risk of hunger and disease, a recent peace deal between the warring factions had fostered hope of a definitive end to the year-long conflict.

Speaking to the 15-member Council, however, Mr. Ladsous provided a sober assessment of the on-the-ground reality, describing the peace talks between both sides as having succumbed to “a serious failure of leadership that remains focused on its pursuit for power rather than care of its people.”

“The likelihood of either side softening its stance remains low,” the UN official continued. “In the light of the fragile security environment, the ongoing round of peace talks is not likely to achieve much progress.”
Mr. Ladsous explained that as the current Addis Ababa peace talks stalled over power-sharing, security arrangements and constitutional reforms, the humanitarian situation in the country was becoming increasingly grim.

According to the UN, in fact, the Organization’s bases across South Sudan are currently sheltering over 110,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) with an additional 1.5 million others displaced throughout the country and 500,000 outside the country. The displacement, Mr. Ladsous added, was increasing amid ongoing fighting.

In addition, the number of food-insecure civilians was slated to rise from the current 2.5 million as the country approaches its critical lean season.

“There is now an urgent need to reinforce the mediation efforts, as well as to impose consequences on the parties if they fail to show willingness to compromise and continue engaging in a conflict that will result in further loss of innocent lives,” declared Mr. Ladsous.

“I urge the Council to consider issuing a strong Presidential Statement calling on the parties to immediately cease all military operations and make the necessary compromises to reach a comprehensive peace agreement during this round of talks, or face the consequences.”

Against that backdrop, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ivan Šimonović, also addressed the Council, detailing a litany of human rights abuses he witnessed first-hand during his recent trip to the country. He painted a bleak picture of South Sudan’s crisis scenario: whole families that were executed based upon their ethnicity; hundreds shot dead in a hospital; child soldiers threatening civilians; women raped.

“Many Government officials told me that the people of South Sudan fought for decades for their dignity, independence, and human rights. What I saw on my mission was certainly not what they have been fighting for,” Mr. Šimonović observed.

“After decades of killing and other violations, there is a need for cultural change based on respect for human life and human rights. It takes two leaders to end a war in South Sudan, but it takes many for the peace to become sustainable.”

Mr. Šimonović stressed that the peace process, just as any future political arrangement, depended on the inclusion of all national stakeholders, from ethnic groups, women, elders, religious leaders, youth, and other civil society actors. Moreover, he added that there was “broad acknowledgment – in and out of South Sudan” of the need to break the cycle of impunity with some concrete accountability measures.

“It is of the utmost importance that this Council remains seized of the question of accountability for past and present violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in South Sudan,” he said. “No efforts should be spared for the peace to be reached rather sooner than later.”
Situation ‘very worrying’ for displaced families from Iraq’s Anbar province, UN officials warn

24 February - The United Nations Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General, Lise Grande, along with Neill Wright, the country’s UN refugee agency (UNHCR) representative, today visited Iraqi families recently displaced from Al Baghdadi district in the western province of Anbar.

“The situation facing these families is very worrying. They have been under siege for days and are highly vulnerable. We're coordinating closely with the Government to help them,” Ms. Grande who is also the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq said in a statement.

Approximately 200 families have already been evacuated from Mojama’a Al-Hay Al-Sakani near Ain Al-Asad Air Base after the Iraqi Security forces broke the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) siege of the area.

Officials say that the distribution of emergency relief items has started and will continue to take place in the coming days to ensure that all those staying with family members and friends, in various neighbourhoods of Baghdad receive the help they need. According to initial assessments, 65 per cent of those displaced are women.

Airlifts of the most vulnerable families have also been carried out by Iraqi Government authorities to Baghdad. The evacuated families have reportedly been living under siege, with limited access to clean water, food or medicines. Five children are reported to have died as a result of the dire conditions suffered by residents of the city.

“UNHCR and its partners will continue to assess the needs of these newly-displaced families to ensure that their many vulnerabilities are addressed; including the need for psycho-social counselling, legal assistance, family kits, and cash assistance for the most vulnerable,” said Mr. Wright.

Across central Iraq, the internal displacement of Iraqi citizens continues, often in areas where aid agencies have limited access. The ongoing conflict in the Anbar Governorate is causing fresh displacement near the cities of Al Baghdadi, Haditha, Ramadi and Fallujah. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in these areas are reported to be in urgent need of fuel, food and medicine, with growing shortages of basic food items and prices spiralling.

While commending international donors for their contribution to address humanitarian needs, Ms. Grande and Mr. Wright emphasized that as the conflict continues, and new waves of displacement occur, more funding is urgently needed to respond in the coming months.

As it stands now, 2.25 million Iraqis are estimated to have been displaced since January 2014. Over 380,000 are currently displaced within the Anbar Governorate.
Security Council renews Yemen sanctions panel for 13 months to promote political transition

24 February - Under the terms of a resolution unanimously adopted by the United Nations Security Council today, members decided to extend the mandate of the group of four experts on Yemen, which was established to oversee sanctions measures employed against individuals and entities designated as threatening peace, security or stability in the country.

The Panel of Experts established pursuant to Council resolution 2140 (2014), will continue to work until 25 March 2016 under paragraph 21 of that text, assisting the Committee that was established by the same resolution with information on individuals and entities involved in undermining the political transition in Yemen, and on incidents that destabilise the transition.

The text urged all parties – Member States, international, regional and sub-regional organizations – to cooperate with the Panel, and urged all interested Member States to ensure the safety of the Panel, as well as their unhindered access to people, documents and sites that would allow it to fulfil its mandate.

It also urged the increased cooperation of Member States from the region on ensuring the effective implementation of the sanctions regime imposed by resolution 2140.

In today’s resolution, Council members expressed concern about ongoing violence in Yemen and the political, security, economic and humanitarian challenges facing the country, as they reiterated their call for all parties to adhere to resolving differences and achieving political goals through dialogue, rather than through violence and provocation.

The text also reaffirmed the need for the full and timely implementation of the political transition following the comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, in line with the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative and Implementation Mechanism, the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, and in accordance with previous resolutions and the expectations of the Yemeni people.

As members determined that the situation in the country constitutes a threat to international peace and security, the resolution was passed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

The follows a resolution adopted just last week in which the Council demanded that secessionist Houthi militias in Yemen "immediately and unconditionally" withdraw from Government and security institutions, and called on all Yemeni parties to engage in good faith in the UN-brokered political talks being led by Special Adviser Jamal Benomar.

Unanimously adopting a new resolution in a rare Sunday evening session, the Security Council on 15 February expressed alarm at the acts of violence committed by the Houthis and their supporters, which have undermined the political transition process in Yemen, and jeopardized the country's stability and unity, demanding that all Yemeni “parties cease all armed hostilities against the people and the legitimate authorities of Yemen.”

The Council's action came just days after Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned in a special briefing to the 15-member body that: “Yemen is collapsing before our eyes. We cannot stand by and watch.” Mr. Ban reminded the international community of its “solemn obligation” under the UN Charter to “do everything possible to help Yemen step back from the brink and get the political process back on track.”
With millions ‘seriously at risk,’ UN launches humanitarian appeal for Ukraine

24 February - The enormous humanitarian needs of the people of Ukraine have intensified since January this year, outstripping local capacities, the United Nations’ top official in Ukraine said today as the international community launched a new humanitarian appeal for the country.

The Humanitarian Response Plan 2015 for Ukraine appeals for $316 million targeting the most vulnerable 3.2 million people of the 5 million estimated to be in need of life-saving interventions, such as healthcare, shelter and clothing, as well as psychosocial care and basic education.

“The lives and dignity of people in conflict areas are seriously at risk,” said Neal Walker, the UN Resident Coordinator in Ukraine. “It is estimated that more than one million people are displaced countrywide and two million people still reside in contested areas, of whom some half million are in underground shelters with little or no facilities.”

Mr. Walker said that since the Plan was originally conceived in January, the population’s needs had intensified and he appealed to the international community to help meet the $316 million needed to supplement the “incredible and crucial” local capacity.

“The crisis is beyond local capacities,” he said. “All need support, as access to services is curtailed. In many locations, the local capacity to respond is overstretched.”

Ukraine’s Minister for Regional Development, Construction, Housing and Utilities, Hennadiy Zubko, joined Mr. Walker in launching the appeal, noting that the Government provides temporary housing and targeted financial assistance to those displaced, while also taking steps to meet their basic needs.

“The support of the international community is very important for the people of Ukraine,” he said. “I am very grateful to humanitarian actors for their commitment and readiness to support the Government of Ukraine in the significant scaling-up of its humanitarian response.”

FEATURE: Climate change and sustainability key to future development agenda, says former UN official

24 February - As United Nations Member States come together to launch the future sustainable development agenda, 2015 seems set to be a year of momentous change for the international community.

This year marks the end of implementation of the landmark UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which world leaders agreed on 15 years ago in an effort to tackle poverty and climate change and to pave the way towards a more gender equal global society. The new targets, to be known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are defining the way forward on the world’s most pressing issues until the next critical deadline in 2030.

Overall, there has been significant progress in meeting the MDG targets. Global poverty has been halved well ahead of the 2015 deadline; in developing countries, 90 per cent of children now enjoy primary education; the number of people lacking access to improved drinking water has halved; and the fight against malaria and tuberculosis has shown results.

Nonetheless, numerous challenges persist. Globally, 73 million young people are looking for work and many more are
trapped in exploitative jobs. In recent years, more than two and a half million more children in affluent countries fell into poverty, bringing the total above 76 million.

Meanwhile, children and adolescents continue to bear the brunt of some of the world’s deadliest conflicts. In Nigeria last April, 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped by the militant group Boko Haram. In Pakistan in December, terrorists killed 132 children at school and on the same day in Yemen, more than a dozen schoolgirls were killed in a car bombing. Children are at risk in the Central African Republic, Gaza, Syria, Iraq, and South Sudan.

As the UN moves forward with the SDGs, questions inevitably remain: how will the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda differ from its predecessor? What are the challenges that lie on the road ahead? And what is needed to make a new sustainable development agenda work?

Enter Sir Richard Jolly: a towering octogenarian whose nimble reflections on the UN’s post-2015 agenda have lent context to what is destined to be a critical pivot year for global development. In fact, there are few UN experts around who boast an institutional memory as prodigious as Mr. Jolly’s or who have such a fine grasp of the Organization’s own development agenda. A former Assistant Secretary-General, holding senior positions at the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Mr. Jolly was also the architect of the widely celebrated Human Development Report as well as the author of some 20 books spanning everything from the UN’s history to the resilient successes of UN ideas.

During his visit to UN Headquarters in New York last month, Mr. Jolly broke down the elements of the UN’s momentous shift in development, noting that while the MDGs had established an initial consensus on what the development goals for the 21st century should be, the SDGs remained “fundamentally” and “strategically” different, expanding upon the MDGs and reframing the agendas and policies for the next decade and a half.

“The SDGs are universal, which is a major advance,” explained Mr. Jolly in a recent interview with the UN News Centre. “Instead of the North speaking to the South, we’re now really recognizing that all countries need to take action for all peoples. Secondly, the SDGs are integrating sustainability and climate change. That again is a fundamental shift from the MDGs that I think was very important.”

**Climate change in focus**

The 17 new SDGs, crafted by a working group of the 193-member UN General Assembly and expected to be adopted by world leaders in September 2015, have pushed sustainability and the fight against climate change to the forefront of the UN agenda. Twelve of the 17 goals underscore the importance of sustainable development in key areas, from urban planning to economic growth, while acknowledging the need to take “urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” across the planet.

“With respect to climate change, the evidence is becoming so overwhelming that last year was the hottest year ever recorded in Britain and ever recorded in the world,” Mr. Jolly said. “Gradually, people are beginning to see these problems despite the naysayers.”

In early February, the UN World Meteorological Organization (WMO) once again confirmed that 2014 was the hottest year on record and part of a larger climate trend of devastating weather patterns and increasing temperatures.

High sea temperatures contributed to exceptionally heavy rainfall and floods in many countries and extreme drought in others. Twelve major Atlantic storms battered the United Kingdom in the early months of 2014, while floods devastated much of the Balkans throughout May. The monthly precipitation over the Pacific side of western Japan for August 2014, meanwhile, was 301 per cent above normal – the highest since area-averaged statistics began in 1946.

At the same time, crippling droughts have struck large swathes of the continental United States, while north-east China and parts of the Yellow River basin did not reach half of the summer average, causing severe drought. The brutal reality of the changing global climate was brought into clearer perspective when the WMO also pointed out that 14 of the 15 hottest years
recorded have all been in the 21st century.

“I think there is the recognition that some global action on climate change, though probably implemented nationally and with a rather weak international agreement, is going to happen,” Mr. Jolly added.

Challenges ahead

Mr. Jolly’s sober assessment is built on the restrained engagement of global stakeholders on issues of sustainability caused, in large part, by the massive 2008 financial crisis that crippled economies and plunged millions of people into unemployment. The UN’s pivot year on development, in fact, comes with numerous Member States still reeling from the crisis’ after-effects, prompting Mr. Jolly to warn that international action had suddenly become “tragically weak” amid a “narrow-minded” and “un-UN-like” international perspective.

“I think it is right to look at the failures of the industrial countries at the moment because to my mind they are very cautious. After a brilliant 2009 G20 meeting which really did look at the need for global action, all the actions agreed on internationally then fell apart for political reasons,” he stated. “I think it’s a major, major challenge.”

In addition, notwithstanding the gains made by the MDGs, economic problems continue to plague many across the globe and pose potential problems for the SDG roll-out.

Mr. Jolly observed, however, that the continuing work to reach development goals had boosted awareness of poverty, prompting the need for national and international bodies to take action which, he said, was a “positive.”

“On the whole, most governments and the international system have understood human goals, and human poverty reduction and human advances. That is just extraordinary,” the former UN official acknowledged.

“So, the SDGs and the MDGs have historical significance that is very impressive and important to recognize. And, I would add that sustainability and climate change are making people realize there is a single global system. That again is an extraordinary positive.”

Mr. Jolly made no forecast for the success of the SDGs but he did admit that as the international community devotes the next 15 years to realizing them, the mobilization of global support and awareness alone would qualify as a paramount achievement.

“That’s what I would define as success,” he concluded. “The more people know about them and change expectations, the better.”

Philippines radio journalist shooting prompts UN call for investigation

24 February - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has denounced the latest killing of a journalist in the Philippines and urged authorities to investigate the murder and “provide the media with as safe an environment as possible to ensure the public’s right to be kept informed.”

Philippines radio journalist Maurito Lim was shot in the head on 14 February by a motorcyclist as he was about to enter his place of work at dyRD Radio in Tagbilaran City.

“I condemn the murder of Maurito Lim,” the UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova said in a statement issued Monday. “This crime needs to be thoroughly investigated for its perpetrators to be brought to justice. Impunity for such crimes increases the vulnerability of all journalists and encourages self-censorship. The authorities must
provide the media with as safe an environment as possible to ensure the public’s right to be kept informed.”

According to UNESCO, a specialized UN agency mandated to defend press freedom and freedom of expression, dozens of journalists have been killed in the Philippines.

**Ban meetis Ukrainian minister, discusses conflict, Minsk accord**

*24 February* - The United Nations Secretary-General met yesterday in New York with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Pavlo Klimkin, to discuss the conflict in the east of that country.

The two discussed the UN's humanitarian and human rights work in affected areas and they agreed on the need for urgent and full implementation of the 12 February 'Package of Measures for the implementation of the Minsk Agreement,' including a lasting and durable cease-fire and immediate withdrawal of heavy weaponry.

Last week, the Council endorsed the so-called 'Package of Measures' with the unanimous adoption of Resolution 2202 (2015) and called on all parties to the conflict to fully implement the cessation of hostilities, as the UN human rights office expressed concern over reported shelling and trapped civilians in the country's east.

Measures outlined in the text also included the withdrawal of all foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine under the monitoring of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as the disarmament of all illegal groups.

On the subject of a peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine, the Secretary-General noted that the UN would be guided by the Security Council on the matter and reiterated his full support toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

**Central African Republic: surge in violence triggers new displacement, including into DR Congo**

*24 February* - An upsurge in violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) has triggered fresh displacement inside the country and across the border into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations refugee agency said today.

Briefing the press in Geneva this afternoon, Karin de Gruijl, Spokesperson for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said that since January, an estimated 30,000 people have fled their homes and found refuge in other parts of the CAR.

Much of the recent violence in the besieged country has been associated with seasonal movements of livestock and clashes between herders and the local and agricultural populations and the anti-Balaka, Ms. de Gruijl said. Some herders have turned to ex-Seleka militias for protection. Civilian populations have been caught in the middle and their villages, houses and belongings have been burned down.

UNHCR has distributed relief items including blankets, jerry cans, kitchen sets and plastic sheeting to more than 1,170 recently displaced families in the CAR town of Bambari. In Batangafo, 800 families have received these emergency kits. However, the security situation there remains precarious.

“Armed elements enter some of the sites for displaced people in Bambari and Batangafo, threatening people and extorting money. Some of the displaced live just meters away from their former homes, yet they cannot go back for fear of losing their lives,” said Ms. de Gruijl.
“While most of the local authorities are absent, many public buildings in Bambari are controlled by ex-Seleka forces. More robust police and gendarmerie presence is urgently needed to protect civilians and to prevent further killings and acts of retaliation,” she added.

Across the border, in the DRC, UNHCR has registered more than 19,000 refugees who have arrived in Bosobolo territory in the north of Equateur Province as a result of new violence since December in CAR’s Kouango district, in Ouaka Prefecture.

“Our teams on the ground report the ongoing arrival of refugees who tell us that they flee clashes between the anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka militias in their villages. They say that their houses are being burned and they have no other choice than to flee. If they stay in their villages, they risk being tortured or killed and women are being raped,” the UNHCR spokesperson said.

Some 2,400 refugees have crossed into the DRC, using new entry points in the territories of Mobayi and Bosobolo since 15 February. Most are children.

UNHCR and its partners are on the ground to set up a new refugee site in the area of Bili, away from the border. Newly arrived refugees currently live in spontaneous settlements on the shore of the Oubangui River, the natural border between the DRC and CAR, in makeshift shelters with very limited access to health care, clean water and food.

UNHCR’s team has also received alarming reports of sexual violence by armed elements from CAR. “On 9 February, three refugee girls were kidnapped by armed elements who crossed into the DRC close to Dula and took them back to the Central African Republic. One girl who managed to escape told us that they were raped. She is now receiving medical treatment. The other girls are still missing,” Ms. de Gruijl said.

In total more than 893,000 people have been forcibly displaced by violence in the Central African Republic. Some 442,000 are displaced inside the country, including more than 50,000 in Bangui, some 35,000 people who fled to Bambari and 33,700 in Batangafo. Some 451,000 are living in exile, mainly in Cameroon (245,000), Chad (94,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (88,000) and the Republic of the Congo (24,000).

Fresh off her recent visit to the CAR and Cameroon where she visited internal displaced persons (IDP) camps, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Kyung-Wha Kang, called the humanitarian situation on the ground dire.

“The overwhelming majority of displaced and refugee families that I met mentioned that insecurity is the main obstacle to them in returning to their homes, or being located elsewhere. They also called for reparation and compensation mechanisms to be established for the violence and losses they suffered. People from minority groups such as the Fulani – also known as Peul - expressed strong feelings of having been marginalized in society,” Ms. Kang said in a statement.

In many places outside Bangui, State authority is almost non-existent, she continued. This means that it is a very dangerous place for humanitarian work. Last year there were nearly 140 security incidents directly targeting aid workers, and since 1 January this year, four humanitarian workers have been kidnapped.

Ms. Kang said that not only is it an extremely complicated environment for aid organizations to work in, especially as the humanitarian needs grow, in both countries, the lack of resources is hampering the aid response.

In Cameroon, Ms. Kang travelled to Yaoundé and visited the Gado camp for CAR refugees in the eastern part of the country. Cameroon is now facing enormous challenges from the impact of attacks by the Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria as well as in the far north of Cameroon itself, she added.
UN nuclear chief meets Iranian minister to boost understanding, move towards agreement

24 February - The head of the UN atomic watchdog held a meeting in Vienna this morning with the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister to follow-up on talks held earlier this month.

Yukiya Amano, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), met with S. Abbas Araghchi, at IAEA headquarters this morning in an effort to facilitate better understanding between the two sides after a previous meeting on 7 February with Foreign Minister Javad Zarif.

A press statement released by the agency today said discussions focused on the need to resolve, as soon as possible, all outstanding issues related to Iran's nuclear programme and the two men recognised the importance of continued dialogue between the IAEA and Iran.

Established as an autonomous organization under the United Nations (UN) in 1957, the IAEA carries out programmes to maximize the useful contribution of nuclear technology to society while verifying its peaceful use. It serves as the world's foremost intergovernmental forum for scientific and technical co-operation in the peaceful use of nuclear technology.

The agency currently conducts in-field verification activities in Iran as part of a Joint Plan of Action, which has involved a significant increase in the frequency of such monitoring. The Plan is aimed at achieving a mutually-agreed long-term comprehensive solution that would ensure Iran's nuclear programme will be exclusively peaceful.

In West Africa, UN launches improved fish drying technique to save lives and environment

24 February - A newly developed fish drying technology is improving food quality and saving lives in West Africa, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced today as it launched its effort to boost food safety and working conditions across the region.

With smoked fish remaining a staple food product and vital source of income for many African coastal communities, the innovative FAO-Thiaroye Processing Technique, otherwise known as FTT and pioneered by the UN agency, will now seek to transform the kiln-drying method traditionally used for smoking fish into a healthier and more environmentally friendly process.

“Traditional smoking techniques often involve a massive burning of wood which leads to a variety of problems,” Yvette Diei-Ouadi, a fishery industry expert at FAO, explained in a press release.

“For one, an exorbitant amount of CO₂ is produced, so the kilns produce more greenhouse gas pollution than they should. Also, traditional smoking releases contaminants known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which are carcinogenic and hazardous to the human respiratory system.”

Smoked fish accounts for a large part of the West African diet. In Côte d'Ivoire, where the FTT is being rolled out, an estimated 20 to 30 per cent of local marine and freshwater catch is consumed in smoked form. Throughout the region, smoked fish is generally preferred by locals for its taste, nutritional benefits, competitive prices and long shelf-life, which ranges from three to 6 months.

Nonetheless, traditional smoking techniques also leave high amounts of tar particles on the smoked fish, affecting taste and
quality and occasionally making it much more difficult to sell.

As a result, the new FTT technology permits users to easily upgrade their traditional ovens while slashing the amount of carcinogenic contaminants and residue produced during smoking. At the same time, the technology also reduces the amount of fuel needed and provides a load capacity five times greater than traditional barrel ovens.

“This is a system developed to address many aspects of fish smoking operations,” said Ndiaye Oumoulkhaïry, a member of the FTT design team. “In the first place stands the safety aspect - to secure consumers’ health and meet international food standards. Then there's reducing post-harvest losses, and also curbing the drudgery of fish processors who are now least exposed to the heat and smoke.”

In Ivorian fishing village of Abobodoumé, the FTT technique is already proving to be a success, according to the FAO, which noted that female fish processors “took immediate liking to the new FTT additions,” including a collection plate which traps dripping fish oils they can re-use for manufacturing soap or as cooking oil.

The new technology is also proving popular in other African fishing nations and its use is starting to spread in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania and Ghana.

High-level event stresses importance of extractive industries to sustainable growth in Africa

24 February - The United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) held a meeting at Headquarters in New York today on the role of the extractive industry in Africa.

The High-Level Expert Group Meeting was organized by Special Advisor Maged Abdelaziz in conjunction with the African Union Commission (AUC), as well as bodies such as the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Department of Public Information (DPI).

The event, which looked to the post-2015 development agenda and the African Union ‘Agenda 2063,’ explored how to enhance management of Africa’s extractive industries in order to fully harness their potential as important drivers for sustainable development, structural economic transformation and inclusive growth.

According to the OSAA, Africa has an abundant natural resource endowment, boasting 12 percent of the world’s oil reserves, 40 per cent of its gold and around 60 percent of its uncultivated arable land. With increasing global demand for primary resources, especially in rapidly growing emerging economies, the continent aims to continue exploiting its comparative advantage, with efforts so far seeing trade grow from $251 billion in 1996 to $1.151 trillion in 2011.

Despite strong export performance in the sector, African countries have not yet fully harnessed the full potential of their rich natural resource endowments or employed their natural resource advantages as an engine for inclusive economic growth.

Under the post-2015 agenda and the African Union Agenda 2063, revenue from natural resources, including the extractive industries, will be a key source for development financing. Both aim at achieving long-term economic growth and full and productive employment, with the AU Agenda 2063, in particular, underscoring the crucial role of industrialization, including through value addition of natural resources.

Sir Paul Collier, the co-director of the Centre for the Study of African Economies at Oxford University and author of the book, The Bottom Billion, was the keynote speaker at the event, while panellists included Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, the Chief Executive Officer of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), the African Union’s development agency, and Fatima Haram Acyl, the African Union Commissioner for Trade and Industry.
**Ban taps veteran diplomat Kubiš to head up UN Iraq mission**

**24 February** - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed Jan Kubiš of Slovakia as his new Special Representative for Iraq, a United Nations spokesperson announced today.

In his new role, Mr. Kubiš, who formally headed the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, will also serve as head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), replacing Nickolay Mladenov of Bulgaria.

The Secretary-General’s spokesperson said Mr. Ban was “grateful” for Mr. Mladenov’s “dedication and leadership of UNAMI” and thanked him for serving in “one of the most challenging United Nations duty stations and at a time of important political and security developments in the country.”

Mr. Mladenov, in turn, has been tapped as the UN’s new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process – a role in which he will, among other things, oversee the ongoing UN-backed reconstruction efforts in Gaza where thousands of people are seeking access to building materials for urgent repairs to their homes following last summer’s conflict in the war-ravaged enclave.

According to the UN spokesperson, Mr. Kubiš will bring to his new role in Iraq several years of experience in diplomacy, foreign security policy, and international economic relations with past experiences as the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia.

Amid ongoing fighting between Iraqi Government forces and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and continuing sectarian tensions across society, the Middle Eastern country is facing a period of immense peace and security challenges.

The country is also being tested by fiscal constraints and UNAMI is currently working actively with the authorities to set up a Recovery and Reconstruction fund, while the challenge posed by supporting persons displaced by conflict also remains huge.

Overall, 5.2 million people need humanitarian assistance, of whom 2.25 million are displaced and 235,000 are refugees from Syria, with the population of the Kurdistan Region having increased by 30 per cent because of the influx.