Ban calls for postponement of Yemen consultations, urges ‘soonest possible’ return to dialogue

26 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has requested that his Special Envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, postpone the planned consultations aimed at seeking a peaceful and Yemeni-led political transition process in the country, according to a United Nations spokesperson.

“The Secretary-General is disappointed that it has not been possible to commence such an important initiative at the soonest possible date and reiterates his call for all parties to engage in United Nations-facilitated consultations in good faith and without pre-conditions,” the Secretary-General’s spokesperson said in a statement issued in New York.

“He also reiterates that the only durable resolution to the crisis in Yemen is an inclusive, negotiated political settlement.”

The consultations – originally scheduled to be held in Geneva on 28 May – would have brought together a broad range of actors including the Yemeni Government and other stakeholders in an effort to stem the ongoing violence afflicting the country.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights’ (OHCHR) latest estimations, at least 1,037 civilians, including 130 women and 234 children, lost their lives in Yemen between 26 March and 20 May, while at least another 2,453 civilians have been injured.
In today’s statement, the UN noted that Mr. Ban had instructed Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed “to redouble his efforts” to consult with the Yemeni Government, Yemen’s political groupings and countries in the region with the aim of producing “a comprehensive ceasefire and the resumption of peaceful dialogue and an orderly political transition.”

In addition, the Secretary-General urged all parties to be mindful of the suffering of Yemeni civilians, adding that he remained “acutely aware” that a postponement or delay in a return to the political process would ultimately exacerbate a steadily deepening humanitarian crisis.

A recent pause in fighting in the country permitted UN agencies to access areas which had been extremely difficult to reach.

In the first four days of the humanitarian pause, which ended on 17 May, relief workers dispatched enough food aid to cover one month of food needs for more than 273,000 people, delivered fuel to ensure safe water access for 1.2 million people, and transported or distributed enough essential non-food items for nearly 32,000 people. Some 47 metric tonnes of medical supplies were given to hospitals and health facilities in five governorates.

Tanzania cholera epidemic improving but ‘significant challenges’ still remain – UN

26 May - United Nations-backed containment measures aimed at stemming the deadly cholera epidemic in western Tanzania's Lake Tanganyika region appear to be working, the Organization's refugee agency (UNHCR) announced today amid a tapering off in the number of reported deaths among both Burundian refugees and locals.

“The reduction in the reported cases is largely due to the concerted approach to contain the spread of the outbreak through intensified measures to promote hygiene,” UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards told reporters at a press briefing in Geneva. “For now the situation is improving, but resolving it fully may take several weeks.”

The Tanzanian cholera epidemic – spawned by a massive influx of Burundian refugees fleeing their country's political unrest – has claimed 30 lives this month alone but as of last Thursday no new cases have been reported, according to UNHCR.

Meanwhile, in all, 4,408 cases have so far been reported with the number of new cases falling to 100 a day from a peak of 915 on 18 May. The deaths have been in the port town of Kigoma on Lake Tanganyika, in the nearby villages of Kagunga and Nyarugusu, and among people being transported by ferry from Kagunga to Kigoma.

Since early April, nearly 100,000 Burundians have fled across the borders, seeking safety in neighbouring Rwanda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has joined with 17 partners to launch the Regional Refugee Response Plan.

With the situation in Burundi remaining tense and with continued violence reported, aid agencies fear that the number of refugees may double over the next six months.

The UN's World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that the cholera outbreak was, in fact, improving but nonetheless warned that the risk of transmission remained “high due to limited access to shelter, toilets, water and essential medical care.”

In a separate press release issued today, WHO Representative for Tanzania, Dr. Rufaro Chatora, observed that “despite significant improvements, especially at Kagunga, the crisis remains dire.”

Dr. Chatora, who visited Kagunga, Tanganyika Stadium, and Nyarugusu refugee camp over recent days to assess the humanitarian crisis and identify ongoing needs, added that the pressure had now shifted to Tanganyika Stadium and Nyarugusu refugee camp “where the sudden increases in population have resulted in very limited access to clean water, poor sanitation and inadequate access basic health care services.”
“The priority in coming days is stepping up the response including intensifying treatment and prevention of cholera, ensuring adequate supply of medicines and supplies, and improving access to clean water,” he declared.

The prompt response by WHO, UN Agencies, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and other partners has greatly contributed to reducing the number of cholera cases, the WHO official added, but the crisis is far from over and significant challenges remain ahead.

Some 500,000 homes and temples across Nepal damaged by earthquake, UN official says

26 May - As teams of trekkers and Nepalese sherpas are now reaching remote, high-altitude villages with humanitarian aid, a senior United Nations development official today drew attention to the post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction needs of more than 500,000 homes and cultural heritage sites in the rural areas.

UN Development Programme (UNDP) Assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support Magdy Martínez-Solimán told reporters at UN Headquarters that the “good news” is that large infrastructure structures such as the main airport, dams, communications and electricity networks had largely survived the twin earthquakes that hit Nepal.

But Mr. Martínez-Solimán, who was briefing on his recent mission to areas of devastation and “daunting challenges” in Nepal in the wake of the 25 April earthquake and its series of powerful aftershocks, said an official assessment of the damage is currently underway and would be ready in early July.

But he described “immense” damage to the 500,000 to 600,000 homes in mostly rural areas, as well as to cultural and historical heritage such as temples, upon which Nepal’s economy depends.

The UNDP official said $175 million is what his agency estimated was needed to reconstruct the homes, which reflected a solid case for “building back better.”

His visit was part of UNDP’s push to hash out a recovery and reconstruction plan for the country that protects and restores infrastructure, services and livelihoods, even as immediate efforts to meet people’s most basic needs continue.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), an estimated 2.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance with over 860,000 people in immediate need due to loss of shelter, limited road access and poverty. The total number of casualties now stands at 8,669 with 384 people still missing, OCHA reported.

Meanwhile, a month after the first of the two earthquakes hit Nepal, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) warned some 70,000 children are at risk of malnutrition and require urgent support, including 15,000 children in 14 of the worst-hit districts who need therapeutic foods – like nutrient-rich peanut paste – for the treatment of severe acute malnutrition.

Tomoo Hozumi, UNICEF’s Representative in Nepal, said in a press release issued Monday that the agency is working “double speed with our partners to provide urgent feeding and care to protect the lives of these children and to build their resistance against diseases, especially water-borne diseases, during the upcoming monsoon season.”

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Nepal, Jamie McGoldrick, said “substantial progress” to reach the survivors has been made and “considering the conditions and complexities, we are now well-positioned to assist all the affected communities.”

The World Food Programme said nearly 2 million people have received food assistance and a new phase of the response dubbed Operation Mountain Express is now underway to reach people in high-altitude villages.

WFP said it is using trucks, tractors and helicopters to deliver to reach people in need, and teams of mountaineers are reaching villages and assessing needs on behalf of WFP and the wider humanitarian response.
“Up to 20,000 local porters will soon begin bringing aid to these communities,” according to the food agency. “This also gives employment to porters who were out of work because of the drop in tourism.”

The coming monsoon season in Nepal is adding further urgency to relief operations because heavy rains expected from June will curtail access to remote rural areas.

**UN health agency governing body ends session agreeing ‘landmark’ reforms on emergency response**

**26 May** - The World Health Assembly wrapped up its work today after giving the greenlight for the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) to reform its emergency and response capacity to better tackle future disease outbreaks like Ebola, and agreeing to address antimicrobial resistance and air pollution, as well as improve access to affordable vaccines and set global nutrition targets.

WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan noted that the agency’s governing board had passed several “landmark resolutions and decisions” including three new resolutions passed today: one on air pollution, one on epilepsy, one laying out the next steps in finalizing a framework of engagement with non-State actors.

Over the weekend, delegates at the 68th World Health Assembly, which had been meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, since 18 May, gave the go-ahead for WHO to “establish an emergency programme, which will be guided by an all-hazards health emergency approach, that emphasizes adaptability, flexibility and accountability, humanitarian principles, predictability, timeliness and country ownership.”

WHO will set up a $100-million contingency fund to provide financing for in-field operations for up to 3 months. The contingency fund will run initially as a two-year pilot and will then be evaluated.

Delegates noted their appreciation for the key coordination role played by WHO in its ongoing work to develop vaccines, diagnostics and drugs for Ebola virus disease.

Also over the weekend, the Assembly endorsed a global action plan to tackle antimicrobial resistance – including antibiotic resistance, “the most urgent drug resistance trend.”

In addition, the Assembly agreed on resolution to improve access to sustainable supplies of affordable vaccines – a key issue for low- and middle-income countries aiming to extend immunization to the entire population.

And today, the delegates adopted a resolution to address the health impacts of air pollution – the world’s largest single environmental health risk.

“All year 4.3 million deaths occur from exposure to indoor air pollution and 3.7 million deaths are attributable to outdoor air pollution,” WHO said in a press release. “This was the first time the Health Assembly had debated the topic.”

The Assembly also asked Member States to strengthen their efforts in providing care for people with epilepsy.

“The resolution calls on the WHO Secretariat to continue to lead and coordinate support to Member States in addressing the global burden of epilepsy so that people with epilepsy can receive timely treatment and can benefit from educational and occupational opportunities, free from stigma and discrimination,” it said.

And finally, the Assembly today welcomed the fact that delegates had reached consensus on many parts of the draft framework of engagement with non-State actors such as non-governmental organizations, private sector entities, philanthropic foundations and academic institutions, noting that it wishes to finalize the framework by the next Health Assembly.
Member States agreed a set of indicators to monitor progress for global nutrition targets to be achieved by 2025 on stunting (low height-for-age), wasting (low weight-for-height), overweight, low birth weight, anaemia, and breastfeeding.

The World Health Assembly is the supreme decision-making body of WHO. It is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and its main functions are to determine the policies of the Organization, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.

**UN launches mass polio vaccination campaign set to target nearly 5.7 million Iraqi children**

26 May - Aiming to target 5.7 million children under the age of five, the United Nations today launched a mass polio vaccination campaign in Iraq, which is set to be conducted in all governorates to maintain the country's polio-free status.

The last case of polio was reported on 7 April 2014 in a 34-month-old girl from the Rasafa district of Baghdad, according to a joint statement released from the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which are jointly spearheading the initiative.

“Despite the civil unrest that engulfs over a third of the country, polio campaigns have continued to reach up to 90 per cent of children through collaborative efforts with multiple line-ministries and local partners,” WHO’s Country Representative to Iraq Dr. Syed Jaffar Hussain said.

Multiple vaccination rounds held in country since then have helped to protect Iraqi children from the paralysis caused by this incurable disease. Despite ongoing conflict, mass population displacement and a complex and unpredictable security situation, only 2 cases of polio were confirmed in Iraq during the regional outbreak in early 2014.

“Significant risks continue to exist and thus there is no room for complacency,” Dr. Hussain added, appealing to the international community and partners for their continued financial and technical support over the next 12 months for 4 additional nationwide vaccination campaigns.

The Government of Iraq has reported a funding gap of $45 million for 2015 and 2016 to keep polio free.

UNICEF’s Country Representative to Iraq, Phillippe Heffinck, commended the leadership of the Ministries of Health and strong collaboration with partners, such as WHO, that have established community ownership for polio campaigns, and created a strong platform for rolling out strong routine immunization services.

“Both of these achievements are not only remarkable, but essential to keep Iraq polio free and improve the health of all Iraqi children,” Mr. Heffinck said.

In May 2015, a report of the WHO Emergency Committee, convened under the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005), identified Iraq as one of 5 countries removed from the list of ‘states infected with wild poliovirus but not currently exporting.’

The report, however, highlighted that Iraq was still ‘vulnerable to international spread’ and must remain vigilant to ensure all children receive the polio vaccine each time it was offered. Any lapse in routine immunization coverage could again leave Iraqi children vulnerable to preventable diseases.

The Committee recommended that Iraq enhance surveillance quality to reduce the risk of undetected transmission; intensify efforts to ensure vaccination of internally displaced persons and refugees; and enhance regional cooperation to ensure prompt detection of wild poliovirus.

As of 2015, polio is only endemic in 2 countries of the region – Afghanistan and Pakistan – but this virus can easily make its way into any population in which children are not adequately vaccinated through routine immunization or outreach.
UN South Sudan envoy describes ‘great challenge’ of protecting civilians on visit to renovated camp

26 May - Travelling around South Sudan to see efforts made by the United Nations to protect civilians in the country, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative, Ellen Margrethe Løj, who also heads the UN Mission (UNMISS), visited Bentiu in Unity state this weekend.

“We face a great challenge in ensuring the protection of the hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians throughout South Sudan,” said Ms. Løj during a joint visit with the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). “UNMISS is deeply troubled by reports of grave violations and abuses of human rights perpetrated during the fighting.”

She said the Mission’s mandate to protect civilians goes beyond the sites run by UNMISS that are dedicated specifically to that purpose and involved tackling crimes committed against civilians anywhere in the country.

“We must be able to document these crimes by being given unimpeded access to areas where violence has occurred,” she said. “I want to reiterate how important it is to hold accountable all those who committed atrocities against civilians during the fighting.”

The Director General of the IOM, William Lacy Swing, accompanied Ms. Løj on the visit, seeing the recent extension of the Mission’s Protection of Civilians site, overseen by the IOM and conducted by a group of UN agencies. The work has included extensive improvements to drainage ahead of the rainy season and the establishment of humanitarian services and shelter.

“This joint visit was made to assess the fate of civilians following the fighting throughout Unity state over the past several weeks,” said Mr. Swing. “The renovation of the site will not only mitigate the deplorable flooding conditions suffered by IDPs (internally displaced persons) during the last rainy season, but will also greatly enhance overall protection at the site.”

Civilians are expected to be relocated in the expanded site in the coming weeks, adding to the over 60,000 civilians already in Protection of Civilian sites in Bentiu and the over 120,000 on sites around South Sudan.

During their stay in Bentiu, Mr. Swing and Ms. Løj also met with Unity state’s acting Governor and its Council of Ministers, as well as with the County Commissioner of Rubkona.
In Ukraine, humanitarian situation still dire amid sporadic fighting, UN reports

26 May - The tenuous situation in eastern Ukraine continues to be marked by sporadic fighting and a crippling humanitarian crisis forcing many civilians to seek refuge in underground shelters or in neighbouring countries, the United Nations relief arm confirmed today.

In its latest situation report on the Ukraine crisis, the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) painted a stark portrait of daily life in the country’s conflict-affected areas amid reports of ongoing hostilities at Donetsk airport, as well as in the towns of Shyrokyne, Avdiivka and Shastia.

Meanwhile, casualties are also being reported daily. According to OCHA, between mid-April 2014 and 14 May 2015, at least 6,334 people have been documented as killed and 15,752 as wounded while unexploded ordinance and landmines pose a continuing threat to civilian lives.

Against that backdrop, the Ministry of Social Policy has registered some 1.3 million people as internally displaced – an increase of about 44,000 people in the past three weeks alone – while the exodus from the country is also on the rise.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reported that about 857,000 Ukrainians have sought asylum, residence permits or other forms of legal stay in neighbouring countries – an increase of about 23,000 people in the past two weeks.

Life in the embattled provinces of eastern Ukraine is also precarious from a healthcare standpoint as services are increasingly curtailed due to lack of medicine and medical equipment.

Access to healthcare is severely constrained across the east and in non-Government controlled areas in particular, because of lack of medicine and medical equipment. OCHA added that there is an increased burden on healthcare facilities particularly due to the influx of displaced families.

Nigeria: UN warns of ‘alarming’ spike in suicide attacks by women and girls

26 May - Northeast Nigeria has witnessed a sharp increase in suicide attacks involving women and girls this year, the United Nations children’s agency warned today, calling on the country’s incoming Government make the safety and well-being of children a political priority.

“Children are not instigating these suicide attacks; they are used intentionally by adults in the most horrific way,” the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Representative in Nigeria, Jean Gough said in a press release, stressing that “they are first and foremost victims – not perpetrators.”

Child suicide bombers not only include kidnapped children, but also involve those displaced and separated from families or those less protected, according to UNICEF.

The numbers of attacks carried out so far this year have already surpassed the total number of such incidents in 2014.

“In 2014, there were 26 incidents of suicide attacks recorded but during the first five months of 2015, 27 incidents had been recorded (until mid-May),” said Laurent Dutordoir, UNICEF child protection specialist in Abuja, Nigeria, who briefed press
in Geneva via telephone today.

He also noted that nine child suicide bombers, whose ages ranged between seven and 17 years, and whom are all girls, have been reported.

“At least 75 per cent of the suicide attacks were strongly indicated to have been carried out by women and children,” Mr. Dutordoir warned.

Concerned that the increased use of child suicide bombers could lead to children being perceived as potential threats, which could put all children involved with armed groups at greater risk of being retaliated against and prevented from rehabilitation and reintegration in their communities, UNICEF is ramping up its assistance to reduce such vulnerabilities.

“UNICEF staff are travelling into the field on a weekly basis,” said Mr. Dutordoir, adding that the staff also works “with local partners on the ground to reach those children, both in internally-displaced persons camps and in informal settings.”

Moreover, UNICEF and partners are working with the Government to identify unaccompanied children, provide remedial education and medical care. So far, over 35,000 children have received such psychosocial support.

UNICEF further calls on the Nigerian authorities to place the safety and well-being of all children, especially those affected by the crisis in the Northeast, at the centre of the political agenda, as the incoming President of Nigeria is expected to be sworn-in this week.

**UN Women announces partnership with top Spanish football team to boost gender equality**

26 May - The United Nations entity dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women announced today a partnership with Valencia Club de Fútbol, the first time ever that UN Women will collaborate with a professional sports team.

“UN Women is dedicated to bringing more men and boys into the gender equality conversation,” said Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, launching the partnership.

“Valencia’s players are strong role models who will lead by example and inspire their vast fan base. We are excited to have Valencia show its support during every match played, with the cause prominently displayed to fans and viewers around the world,” she added.

Under the partnership, the UN Women logo will be emblazoned on the back of the team’s players’ jerseys when they play in European competitions such as the Champions League, one of the most renowned tournaments in the world and the most prestigious club competition in European football.

In addition, special matches and soccer clinics will take place over the next four years throughout Spain, the Americas and other parts of the world.

Valencia CF is the only club in the top Spanish league, Liga BBVA with a female Chair, Lay Hoon Chan, who is also the first woman ever to hold that position in Valencia CF’s 96-year history.

“We are honoured to work alongside UN Women and the global community to support and bring awareness to such a remarkable cause,” said Ms. Chan. “This is a long-term commitment to really help make a difference to expand advocacy efforts towards gender equality. It’s not only a women’s issue, it’s a human rights issue that Valencia CF strongly believes in.”

With high-profile public advocacy initiatives such as HeforShe, UN Women seeks to engage men and boys across the globe
as agents of change, and the entire Valencia CF first team, including superstars Dani Parejo, Shkodran Mustafi, Paco Alcácer and Alvaro Negredo, as well Valencia CF Executive President, Amadeo Salvo, and Valencia CF Ambassador Mario Alberto Kempes kicked off the campaign in New York.

The new jerseys will be introduced when the team travels to Columbus, Ohio to play the MLS team Columbus Crew on 27 May, and the partnership will bring awareness of the commitment to gender equality shared by Valencia CF and UN Women to new audiences.

**New Kyrgyz law on civil society groups must protect free expression, association – UN expert**

26 May - The United Nations rights office called today on the Government of Kyrgyzstan to ensure that the freedoms of expression and association are protected in line with international human rights standards as the country’s Parliament prepared to hear the first reading of draft law that could negatively affect the work of civil society organizations there.

“We urge a review of this draft law to ensure that it does not restrict the important work of civil society organizations in the country,” said Rupert Colville, the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The draft law requires non-commercial organizations established in the Kyrgyz Republic, involved in “political activities” and receiving funding from foreign sources, to register as “foreign agents.”

The UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) says the law fails to adequately define the term “political activities,” referring only to “activities aimed at influencing the decisions of public authorities in order to change their policy, as well as activities aimed at influencing the public opinion for the above-mentioned purposes.”

“This vague wording may put at risk numerous organizations working to deliver services or conduct human rights advocacy,” said Mr. Colville.

It also requires that materials published by civil society organizations through the media and the Internet must note that they were published or distributed by a non-commercial organisation acting as a “foreign agent.”

“The term "foreign agent" carries extremely negative connotations and could lead to stigmatization, mistrust and hostility towards activists, human rights defenders and civil society organizations,” he said.

The statement explained that the draft law would give the Ministry of Justice powers to conduct inspections of organizations, and to request and check internal documents. The Ministry would have the power to send representatives to participate in internal activities and to determine whether or not the organization complies with the goals of its creation.

In cases where an organization fails to file an application for inclusion in the register of non-commercial organisations acting as a “foreign agent,” the Ministry would have the authority to suspend their activities for up to six months without waiting for a court decision.

“If adopted, these new oversight powers would contradict the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Kyrgyzstan is a party,” said the statement.

The draft law also provides for criminal liability and imprisonment of up to three years for establishing a non-commercial organisation whose work aims to “incite citizens to refuse to fulfil their civic duties or commit other unlawful acts.”

“This may lead to the criminalization of the work of human rights defenders,” it warned. “The terms ‘inciting’ and ‘propaganda acts’ are ill-defined and broad, and may give rise to subjective interpretation.”
Serbia and Kosovo must not squander chance to overcome challenges, Security Council told

26 May - As Serbia and Kosovo aim to overcome the legacy of conflict, the two countries must avoid procrastination on implementing the remaining steps of the April 2013 Accord and allowing older issues to shackle opportunities to open new ground, the United Nations Security Council was told today.

During his quarterly briefing to the 15-member body, Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) described the two meetings between the Prime Ministers of Serbia and Kosovo in the framework of the Brussels dialogue as “important milestones.”

It is encouraging that recruitment of judges and prosecutors had begun with a number of applications for those positions, in a process that required continued flexibility and goodwill, Mr. Zarif said.

However, the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities, a core provision of the April 2013 agreement, remained unresolved.

“Steady leadership is required from both Pristina and Belgrade in order to enable progress,” he said.

While fully acknowledging the complexity of issues and time required to establish the functional Community/Association, it would be vital to demonstrate goodwill in order to maintain the political momentum through the international community’s firm support, Mr. Zarif said.

There should be no undue delays in the steps required from Kosovo towards the establishment of the special court in order to try cases arising from the findings of the European Union Special Investigative Task Force.

Swift progress on the issue of 1,653 missing persons also is also essential to heal the wounds of conflict and alleviate the grief of the families the victims, he added.

Security Council extends UN mission in Somalia until August

26 May - The Security Council today adopted a resolution extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) as the Horn of Africa country continues down its road towards political recovery and increased security.

The resolution – adopted unanimously by the 15-member Council – reaffirms the UN body’s “respect” for Somalia’s “sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and unity” while allowing the Organization and African Union (AU) to review the dynamics of a temporary surge of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops.

Moreover, the Council recalled its request for both the UN and AU to set out a series of recommendations for the next steps in the military campaign against Al-Shabaab - the Islamist extremist group that has waged a long-standing terrorist campaign against Somalia's Government.

In a recent briefing of the Security Council, Nicholas Kay, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and head of UNSOM, told Council members that momentum had been regained on efforts to achieve political progress in the
country, pointing to work by federal, regional and local leaders, and parliamentarians to build a State through dialogue and reconciliation, and top-level commitment to deliver Somalia's Vision 2016 plan.

At the same time, however, he conceded that there was “still a long way to go,” adding that with so much at stake between now and 2016, “we can expect Al-Shabaab to do everything it can to derail the political process.”

Just over the weekend, in fact, Yusuf Muhammad Dirir, a Member of the Federal Parliament, was shot and killed along with his driver while another MP, Abdullahi Boss Ahmed, was wounded in the same attack.

Today’s Security Council extension will now see UNSOM’s mandate expire on 7 August 2015.

**UN rights chief spotlights Burundi, migrant crises in Europe and Asia, other pressing issues**

26 May - The top United Nations human rights official drew attention to several issues of concern today in an informal address to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council from the eruption of violence in Burundi and the overflowing migrant dilemmas in the Mediterranean and South-East Asia, to the protracted and worsening conflict in South Sudan.

“When I left Burundi, on 15 April, 6,000 Burundians had fled the country due to fear of political violence and intimidation. Five weeks later, that number has swelled by a further 110,000 frightened people,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein told the Council.

“The attempted coup of 13 May, and the assassination of opposition leader Zedi Feruzi on Saturday, has further intensified tension,” he added, expressing alarm for the violence of the Imbonerakure militia, a strong supporter of President Nkurunziza’s government.

Burundi is a country with “deep and terrible knowledge of the potential consequences of outbreaks of violence,” and after a decade of growing recovery, and prosperity, these recent events are a “significant setback,” Mr. Zeid said.

He commended the efforts of the African Union, International Conference on the Great Lakes region, the East African Community, European Union (EU) and the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes to draw all actors to the negotiating table and protect human rights and the rule of law.

On a positive note, Mr. Zeid commended Tunisia for “turning its back on the oppression of the past,” and for its resolute adoption of human rights goals. On the heels of his visit to the North African nation last month, the rights chief said that the country’s new Constitution is in line with international human rights standards and that legislation has been adopted to combat the persistent issue of torture. Authorities have also made significant efforts regarding the rights of persons with disabilities and the freedom of the media.

“The entire Middle East and North Africa region would certainly look very different today if leaders of other countries had had the wisdom to take a similar approach,” he said.

In Europe and South-East Asia, people are “embarking on a desperate voyage out of fear and need,” and are merely fleeing the relentless conflict, wide-ranging oppression of their human rights and repression and persecution, Mr. Zeid said.

In the Mediterranean, over 1,800 have died at sea so far this year, and 7,000 people were rescued in just the first three days of this month, he told the Human Rights Council, expressing concern that the disproportionate focus on enforcement, and the militarization of that enforcement, raises a large number of concerns, beyond the urgent and absolute need to protect the lives.

“Any law enforcement response to migrant smuggling must respect international standards for human rights,” he stressed.
As for the European Agenda on Migration issued two weeks ago and which proposes quotas for the resettlement of 20,000 refugees within the EU, he said this small number of places is wholly inadequate to the magnitude of the crisis and urged far greater emphasis on expanding channels for migration into Europe, including for low-skilled labour and family reunification.

“A more humane, less mean-spirited response to their plight would be more worthy of Member States of the United Nations,” emphasized Mr. Zeid.

Meanwhile, in South-East Asia, in the first quarter of this year, 25,000 people have set out to sea from Myanmar and Bangladesh and at least 1,050 people have died at sea. And many have been violently abused and robbed by the smugglers whom they paid to facilitate their voyage.

While Indonesia and Malaysia are providing a temporary lifesaver, it is not enough. The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which committed itself in its Charter to human rights and humanitarian principles, must fulfil their obligations to search and rescue all those in peril at sea, and offer lasting protection to people who are fleeing persecution. The treatment of the Rohingya, thousands of who are fleeing Myanmar, not only violates human rights norms, but complicates Myanmar’s relations with its neighbours.

“I hope the discrimination that targets this vulnerable minority will swiftly be reversed, and that the Rohingya will be able to take their rightful place in the country where they were born,” he said.

He also expressed dismay that in Australia, people on boats intercepted at sea are sent to detention centres, and he called for the protection of human rights at places of transit and at borders, and a “principled campaign” against xenophobia and discrimination.

Lastly, on South Sudan, he said that despite the best efforts of the African Union, Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and the UN, in the past two weeks, more people have sought refuge at protection sites managed by the UN Mission in the country, UNMISS.

“Some had to trek hundreds of kilometres by foot, and braved attacks by armed groups along the way,” he said.

Armed attacks also directly threaten some UNMISS protection sites, and 7 people were recently killed at one of the locations, in Upper Nile state. Humanitarian access has been severely constrained, and aid agencies have pulled out of several locations in Unity state due to fighting.

“It has been almost 18 months since this senseless conflict erupted, with virtually no accountability for the numerous violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law that have been committed,” he said.

The conflict itself is, at least in part, a direct consequence of unresolved issues from the past. Previous cycles of violent attacks and killings, committed with absolute impunity, have left many people with unresolved grievances. It is therefore of the utmost importance that accountability remains a priority in seeking a resolution to the conflict.
Lebanon: as security challenges grow, top UN official in country urges end to political vacuum

25 May - The vacuum in the post of Lebanon's presidency has undermined the country’s ability to address a range of growing security, economic and social challenges, the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Sigrid Kaag, warned today.

In a press release marking the one-year point since Lebanon has been without a president, Ms. Kaag observed that the vacuum had contributed to “political polarization at a time when Lebanon must make a united effort to safeguard the country from the impact of the Syrian crisis.”

There has been a presidential vacuum in Lebanon since the term of Michel Sleiman came to an end on 25 May 2014. UN officials and the Security Council have repeatedly urged the Lebanese Parliament to elect a new leader without delay.

The country has also been dealing with renewed terrorist threats and a growing refugee population resulting from the conflict in neighbouring Syria that currently numbers almost 1.2 million.

Urging Lebanon’s leaders to adhere to the country’s constitution and to the Taef Agreement and National Pact, the UN Special Coordinator called on all stakeholders to put national interests above partisan politics “for the sake of Lebanon’s stability and to show the flexibility and sense of urgency needed to resolve this issue.”

In addition, Ms. Kaag commended Lebanon's Prime Minister Tammam Saeb Salam for upholding a unified government “despite enormous pressures” and for showing “remarkable leadership in the face of increasingly difficult circumstances.”

“The unified international support shown for Lebanon should be accompanied by meaningful action by Lebanon's leaders,” she declared.

“The presidential election is a Lebanese process, and I call on Members of Parliament to fulfil their constitutional duties, to uphold the country's democratic tradition and convene to elect a President without further delay.”

At UN meteorological forum, experts meet to discuss post-2015 action plan, climate change

25 May - With a welcoming 'tweet' from the International Space Station and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's renewed appeal for "bold climate action," the United Nations-backed World Meteorological Congress opened its seventeenth session today as international delegates will seek to address continuing concerns over global warming.

“We rely on you, the world's meteorologists to provide us with the scientific knowledge that leaders in government, business and society at large need to make informed choices,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared in a video message.

“As the global thermostat rises, meteorological services are more essential than ever,” he continued. “I look forward to working with you to advance bold climate action which will improve the lives of people and the health of our planet.”

The opening of the quadrennial session of the World Meteorological Congress was also greeted by astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti from orbit as she tweeted “captivating and powerful” images of the planet's atmosphere but admitted that understanding it was “a challenge,” according a press release issued by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).
The Congress will now discuss the strategic role of the WMO in the post-2015 new global agenda on sustainable development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk reduction while also deciding on the UN agency's Strategic Plan, budget and office holders for the next four years.

In addition, it will debate cross-cutting programmes to meet the needs of the world's ever-growing urban areas, which will be home to 70 per cent of the world's population by 2050 and increasingly susceptible to multiple weather and water-related hazards as well as environmental “stressors” like pollution.

“It is a pivotal year for action on behalf of future generations,” WMO Secretary-General Michel Jarraud affirmed.

“We have more than a responsibility. We have a moral duty to take action to limit climate change. “If we don't do it we will be judged by our children and our grandchildren.”

Concluding Ireland visit, UN chief tells refugee community world must provide ‘safe avenues of migration’

25 May - The international community must intensify efforts to provide regular and safe avenues of migration and access to protection, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared today as he wrapped up his trip to Ireland with a visit to a community of resettled refugees.

Addressing a gathering of people hailing from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Sudan and Syria, Mr. Ban recalled his time as a child during the Korean War when he fled, along with his family, into the hills surrounding his village.

“As we climbed in the rain, I looked back on the only world I knew: where I had played, where I had gone to school, where I had lived with my family; all of it was in flames. Our lives went up in smoke,” he remembered.

“Despite the hardships, despite the darkness, I came through it. Today, I carry a simple message: The world is with you, and I am with you.”

The Secretary-General drew attention to the recent tragedies in the Mediterranean and in Southeast Asia where thousands of migrants and refugees have perished after falling victim to human trafficking as they sought better lives elsewhere.

According to the UN, in the Mediterranean alone, the 1,800 deaths in the first month of the year represent a 20-fold increase over the same period last year – and at this pace, between 10,000 and 20,000 migrants would perish by autumn. About one third of those crossing the Mediterranean are Syrian refugees. Thousands more are from Eritrea, Somalia, Afghanistan and other nations.

In a single weekend in April, 900 people died attempting to cross the Mediterranean.

This “grievous loss of life,” Mr. Ban added, could be prevented through a more accessible and transparent system of migration facilitated by the creation of additional safe and regular avenues and access to protection.

In addition, he said, private sponsorship schemes, enhanced family reunification and flexible visa arrangements, including for humanitarian, study and work purposes, can help reunite families separated by tragedy.

“When we consider how to prevent such tragedies, it is important to think of the individuals who have been forced to flee, and ensure that the response reflects our common values and principles of humanity, solidarity, and respect for human rights,” the Secretary-General continued.

“I welcome the proposals in the European Commission's “Agenda on Migration”, and particularly its focus on saving lives
and ensuring the protection of those in need,” he added.

“The United Nations and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees are ready to work with the EU, its Member States and relevant third countries in supporting and further developing the measures included in the Agenda.”

**Nepal: with monsoon season nearing, UN races humanitarian relief to quake-affected communities**

25 May - Marking one month after a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal killing thousands and devasting large swathes of the country's Kathmandu valley, the United Nations relief arm is continuing to intensify its humanitarian operations as it supports national and local authorities with critical life-saving efforts.

“The momentum is there,” said Jamie McGoldrick, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Nepal, in a press release issued today. “Considering the conditions and complexities, we are now well-positioned to assist all the affected communities.”

The 25 April earthquake, and its 7.3 magnitude follow-up on 12 May, damaged 26 of Nepal's hospitals and over 1,100 health facilities while affecting some 5.6 million people, half of whom have been displaced. An estimated 8,500 people were killed by the two quakes.

In addition, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has confirmed that 8.1 million people are in need of humanitarian support while another 1.9 million require food assistance.

Nevertheless, among the major obstacles facing emergency responders is Nepal's unique and challenging mountainous topography which has rendered many affected communities difficult to reach. According to OCHA, some 315,000 people in the 14 most affected districts remain in areas inaccessible by road while 75,000 others cannot even be reached by air.

With monsoon season no more than three weeks away, time is now of the essence as affected communities – without shelter and short on food supplies – remain more vulnerable than ever to potential landslides and torrential rains, the UN has warned.

As a result, OCHA has reported that elite climbers and porters have joined the relief efforts, setting off on foot from humanitarian staging areas where aid is dropped off in order to optimize delivery to the more hard-to-reach areas.

“We don't have much time left to achieve what we set out to accomplish,” Mr. McGoldrick continued. “But with the right support at the right time, we can assist people who desperately need our help, even those in the remote hard-to-reach places.”

Against that backdrop, however, there is also growing concern that international funding for the humanitarian response is, to date, insufficient. In today's press release, OCHA warned that only $92.4 million, or 22 per cent of what is required for the response, was received against the $423 million humanitarian appeal.
On Africa Day, UN chief spotlights continent’s achievements, reflects on challenges of 2015

25 May - Each year, Africa Day is an opportunity to celebrate the continent’s achievements and to reflect on its challenges, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, highlighting the courage and determination it took to make remarkable progress to end the Ebola outbreak and urging leaders to commit to ending violence against women and empower them.

“The dominant story of the year has been the Ebola crisis that swept West Africa, claiming at least 11,000 lives and threatening hard-won social, economic and political achievements,” Mr. Ban said in his remarks on the Day, which is celebrated worldwide on 25 May.

Now, we have to intensify efforts to get to zero and stay at zero cases, repair the damage and strengthen social and institutional resilience throughout the continent, Mr. Ban urged.

To help mobilize support for this important task, the UN chief will convene an International Ebola Recovery Conference at the United Nations in New York in July.

Overall, the continent’s economy grew by roughly four per cent in 2014, creating one of the longest stretches of uninterrupted positive economic expansion in Africa’s history.

“As a result, a growing number of Africans have joined the middle class each year. With investment in education, health and infrastructure increasing, the prospects for much of Africa are bright,” the Secretary-General added.

The challenge now is to spread these benefits of Africa’s progress more broadly and deeply, particularly to the women and girls who represent Africa’s future. Empowering women will help build better, more equal and more prosperous societies, Mr. Ban said, commending the commitment of the African Union to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

“While we work to break down the social, economic, environmental and cultural obstacles that women and girls face, let us also recognize the gains that have been made,” he emphasized.

“Africa leads the world in female representation in parliaments and the continent has one of the highest rates of female entrepreneurship. Let us be inspired by these successes and intensify efforts to provide Africa’s women with better access to education, work and health care and, by doing so, accelerate Africa’s transformation,” the Secretary-General said.

He called on the international community to do more to end violence against women and girls while strengthening their role in all fields, including peacebuilding.

Despite an overall decline in the number of conflicts, too many Africans still experience violent conflict. Women and girls bear the brunt and are frequent targets of sexual violence and abuse.

“We know that conflicts breed where people suffer from poor governance, human rights violations, exclusion and poverty,” the UN chief said, applauding Africa’s vision to build, by 2063, a peaceful and prosperous continent where democracy, human rights and the rule of law are entrenched and flourishing, starting with the aim to silence all guns by 2020.

“I reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations to work with the African Union, the regional economic communities and African countries and their citizens to make this vision a reality,” he added.
In Ireland, UN’s Ban says strong cooperation key to overcoming global challenges

24 May - Amid an explosion of world conflicts, humanitarian crises and human rights challenges, the international community is enduring a “time of test” which demands strong global cooperation and bold action, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today affirmed.

“Today’s conflicts are increasingly complex,” the Secretary-General declared in remarks delivered upon receiving the Tipperary International Peace Award in a ceremony in Tipperary, Ireland.

“The lines between terrorists, transnational criminals and extremists are blurring. Civil wars have impacts well beyond their borders,” Mr. Ban continued. “Yet there remains an enormous gap between demands and our capacities.”

Listing the numerous peace and security challenges facing the UN – from Syria to Yemen to South Sudan – the Secretary-General observed that in order to achieve success, the Organization's operations now called for stronger partnerships “based on trust and burden-sharing” while also establishing critical attention on prevention.

“The new sustainable development agenda being shaped by the Member States has a strong preventive dimension, with a focus on building effective institutions of governance,” he confirmed. “Adopting a bold agenda and taking action against climate change can set us on course towards an end of poverty and the beginning of stability for millions.”

At the same time, the myriad security crises and human rights violations afflicting the planet were also stretching the UN's resources thin, he added, noting that all actors – Governments, business and civil society – needed “to join hands as never before.”

However, despite this need, civil society organizations around the world remain “under immense pressure” as military crackdowns, arbitrary arrests and other acts of intimidation sought to limit their ability to help define and tackle human rights issues, said Mr. Ban.

“In accepting the Tipperary International Peace Award, I want to sound a call to protect the space needed by civil society. Confident nations are those that see civil society as an indispensable partner in working for the betterment of society.”

Against that backdrop, the Secretary-General praised Ireland for its role as a “steadfast friend” of the United Nations on issues ranging from peacekeeping to human rights to nuclear non-proliferation.

“It is time for an era of stronger cooperation and action to respond to the millions of people around the world who look to the global body to uphold its obligation to maintain international peace and security,” he concluded. “Ireland's culture of commitment gives me hope.”
Somalia: UN official condemns killing of parliamentarian, reiterates support for political process

24 May - The top United Nations official in Somalia has condemned a deadly attack against two Somali Members of Parliament (MP) and reiterated the Organization's support for the country's democratic process.

Yusuf Muhammad Dirir, a Member of the Federal Parliament, was shot and killed on 23 May along with his driver while another MP, Abdullahi Boss Ahmed, was wounded in the same attack, according to a press release issued by the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia earlier today.

“The assassination of Mr Yusuf Muhammad Dirir is an abhorrent act of terrorism,” declared Nicholas Kay, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and head of UNSOM. “I wish Abdullahi Boss Ahmed a speedy recovery and I commend all Somalia's MPs for their courage and dedication in the face of continued attacks against them. The UN is committed to supporting the important work of the Federal Parliament.”

In a recent briefing of the Security Council, Mr. Kay told Council members that momentum had been regained on efforts to achieve political progress in the country, pointing to work by federal, regional and local leaders, and parliamentarians to build a State through dialogue and reconciliation, and top-level commitment to deliver Somalia's Vision 2016 plan.

At the same time, however, he conceded that there was “still a long way to go,” adding that with so much at stake between now and 2016, “we can expect Al-Shabaab to do everything it can to derail the political process,” referring to the Islamist extremist group that has waged a long-standing terrorist campaign against Somalia's Government.

In today's press release, Mr. Kay reiterated that sentiment, warning that the murder of MPs “is an attempt to intimidate and undermine those working to build a better Somalia.”

“Theyir killers will not achieve that objective,” he concluded.

Top UN official in South Sudan urges accountability for human rights violations

24 May - The United Nations Special Representative for South Sudan, Ellen Margrethe Løj, has urged accountability and justice for those responsible for gross human rights violations committed as a result of South Sudan's continuing fighting.

The announcement came as Ms. Løj completed a visit to a protection-of-civilians (PoC) site run by the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Bentiu, located in the country's Unity state, and following a recent enlargement of the camp.

According to a joint press release issued earlier today by UNMISS and the International Organization of Migration (IOM), the PoC site's extension work included ground works to improve drainage before the rainy season and the establishment of humanitarian services and shelter amid a growing influx of displaced persons fleeing the country's violence.

More than 60,000 internally displaced persons have sought shelter and assistance at the UNMISS camp in Bentiu, and an additional nearly 25,000 at the UNMISS camp in Malakal, only further magnifying a dire humanitarian crisis caused by an ongoing military offensive in Unity state which has relentlessly targeted civilians and destroyed countless homes.

“UNMISS is deeply troubled by reports of grave violations and abuses of human rights perpetrated during the fighting,” Ms. Løj declared in the press release.
“We must be able to document these crimes by being given unimpeded access to areas where violence has occurred,” she continued. “I want to reiterate how important it is to hold accountable all those who committed atrocities against civilians during the fighting.”

South Sudan's ongoing conflict began in December 2013 and has been marked by brutal violence against civilians and deepening suffering across the country. Overall, some 119,000 people are sheltered in UN compounds while the Organization estimates that the number of people in need for 2015 will include an anticipated 1.95 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and a projected 293,000 refugees.

Moreover, in recent weeks, the fighting in the country has worsened considerably.

Just last Friday, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein warned that UN human rights monitors had been denied access to various sites in Unity state by members of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/A) as they sought to verify reports of widespread killings, rapes, abductions and the burning and destruction of towns and villages throughout Unity state.

**Burundi: UN chief condemns killing of opposition politician as tensions in country rise**

24 May - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned the killing of a Burundian politician and his bodyguard in a move that threatens to further destabilize the country amid simmering political tensions and a growing humanitarian crisis.

Zedi Feruzi, leader of the opposition Union pour la paix et le développement (UPD) Zigamibanga party in Burundi, and his bodyguard, were reportedly shot dead in the country capital of Bukumbura late yesterday evening. According to the UN spokesperson's office, the killing comes just one day after a fatal grenade attack on Bujumbura's central market that left two dead and many others wounded.

In a statement issued late last night, the UN spokesperson said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged the Burundian authorities to swiftly bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice as the incidents “threaten to entrench mistrust and trigger further violence.”

“These acts of violence constitute a stark reminder of the need for all Burundian political leaders to address the current political crisis with the highest sense of responsibility and to place peace and national reconciliation above partisan interests,” the statement declared.

“The Secretary-General reiterates his calls for calm and restraint. He calls on the Burundian authorities to uphold the human rights of all Burundians, including the freedoms of assembly, association and expression, and to take concrete steps to prevent political killings and violence.”

Against that backdrop, the political tensions in Burundi have also contributed to a mounting humanitarian crisis as thousands of Burundian refugees continue to seek safety in neighbouring countries. Since early April, in fact, nearly 100,000 Burundians have fled across the borders to Rwanda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

With the situation in Burundi remaining tense and with continued violence reported, aid agencies fear that the number of refugees may double over the next six months. And with the Tanzanian Government this week declaring a cholera epidemic in the Kigoma area of Lake Tanganyika where many of the refugees are, the situation has grown increasingly complicated and the urgency of implementing the response plan has increased.

Some 31 people have died from the disease so far, including 2 locals and 29 refugees. The deaths have been in the port town of Kigoma on Lake Tanganyika, in the nearby villages of Kagunga and Nyarugusu, and among people being transported by ferry from Kagunga to Kigoma.
In the statement, the UN spokesperson added that the Secretary-General continued to encourage Burundian stakeholders to pursue the consultative political dialogue facilitated by his Special Envoy Said Djinnit and other regional actors and called on them to remain undeterred by “those who, through violence, seek to prevent the creation of an environment conducive to peaceful, credible and inclusive elections in Burundi.”

Meanwhile, in a separate statement issued later in the day, the UN Security Council also condemned “in the strongest terms” both the killing of Mr. Feruzi and the deadly grenade attack as it reiterated its call on “all Burundian stakeholders to demonstrate their sense of responsibility and exercise calm and restraint in the interest of peace and reconciliation.”

Moreover, the Council reiterated its “intent to respond” to violent acts which threaten peace and security in Burundi.

**Libya: UN condemns string of suicide attacks, urges continued political dialogue**

23 May - The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has condemned a spate of suicide bombings committed by Islamist terrorists in what it says is a blatant effort to undermine the country’s ongoing political dialogue.

“At a time when all parties in Libya are exerting intense efforts to try and reach a political agreement that brings an end to the political and military conflict, there can be no doubt about the timing of these terrorist attacks, which are clearly part of a systematic campaign to undermine the ongoing dialogue process, and to instil a sense of mistrust and hostility among the different parties,” UNSMIL declared in its statement.

According to reports, militants aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) have claimed responsibility for the attacks which have taken place over the past week in the areas of al-Qubba, Sirte, and Misrata.

In its statement, the UN Mission reiterated its call on all political stakeholders and security actors in the country “to refrain from taking any action that undermines the ongoing dialogue efforts” or which escalates military tensions and provides space for ISIL to derail the peace efforts.

“In this regard, the Mission welcomes the recent statements by a number of civilian and military entities in Libya pledging commitment to ongoing efforts in support of dialogue and local reconciliation initiatives,” UNSMIL continued.

In addition, the statement said the Mission praised the various reconciliation gestures that have taken place between different towns and cities over the past weeks and which had added “further positive momentum” to efforts to reach a comprehensive and durable solution to the Libyan conflict.
UN chief disappointed as Member States unable to reach agreement on nuclear non-proliferation

23 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has expressed disappointment at the inability of Member States to reach consensus on a “substantive outcome” on a non-proliferation treaty key for global nuclear disarmament, according to a United Nations spokesperson.

In a statement issued earlier today regarding the conclusion of the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the UN spokesperson said the Secretary-General particularly regretted that States parties were “unable to narrow their differences on the future of nuclear disarmament or to arrive at a new collective vision on how to achieve a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.”

“The Secretary-General appeals to all States to sustain the momentum they have built over the past five years, including new initiatives in the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and continuing efforts to strengthen nuclear non-proliferation,” the statement continued. “With respect to the Middle East, the Secretary-General continues to stand ready to support efforts to promote and sustain the inclusive regional dialogue necessary to achieve this goal.”

Mr. Ban has previously lamented a reversal in progress towards new arms reduction agreements following “allegations of destabilizing violations of existing agreements.”

In addition, he has warned that the international tide of nuclear abolition – so strong in 2010 – has, in fact, ebbed leading to mounting tensions between nuclear-armed States and a return to Cold War mind sets.

In today's statement, the Secretary-General's spokesperson added that Mr. Ban hoped that the growing awareness of “the devastating humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons continues to compel urgent actions for effective measures leading to the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons.”

In Hanoi, Ban says Viet Nam and UN ‘natural partners’ in quest for global peace, sustainable development

23 May - In a year of critical efforts against climate change and growing global security challenges, Viet Nam's strong commitment to sustainable development and international peace have made it a “natural” partner of the United Nations, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.

Completing his trip to Hanoi, the Secretary-General celebrated his final day in the Southeast Asian state by inaugurating the energy efficient and sustainable “Green One UN House,” which he has lauded as “an example of how the UN and Viet Nam can work together to combat climate change and deliver as one for the people of Viet Nam.”

“This magnificent new Green One United Nations House is one more concrete way the United Nations in Viet Nam is leading by example,” Mr. Ban told reporters at a press conference in the Vietnamese capital. “This One UN House is a powerful symbol of how Viet Nam can be a true pioneer for the United Nations. This country is helping to prove how well we can reform how we operate and enhance how we deliver as one around the world.”

Following his meeting with Vietnamese President Trương Tấn Sang yesterday, the Secretary-General also wrapped up his visit to the country by delivering remarks to Viet Nam's Peacekeeping Centre, Diplomatic Academy, and National Assembly in an effort to solidify the bond between Viet Nam and the United Nations, especially in a key year for global efforts against climate change and amid the Organization's post-2015 development agenda roll-out.
“Viet Nam and the United Nations are natural partners,” Mr. Ban declared at the National Assembly. “I am here to strengthen our partnership even more for the future of our world.”

In his remarks, the Secretary-General spotlighted Viet Nam's particular focus on the need for “effective global action on climate change,” as he recalled the country's leadership on the Millennium Development Goals and voiced his hope for its “constructive engagement” at the upcoming Climate Change Conference in Paris in December.

The theme of 2015 as a year for global action on climate and sustainability issues was also a highlight of Mr. Ban's address to the Diplomatic Academy of Viet Nam – a “prestigious” institution providing in-depth training, strategic research and forecasts on a wide range of pressing regional and global issues to Viet Nam's diplomatic corps.

“There can be no peace without development, no development without peace, and sustainable peace and development are not possible without respect for fundamental human rights,” the Secretary-General affirmed as he reminded those gathered that “these three inter-connected pillars” have provided the basis for the UN's response to a host of contemporary challenges.

“We must work together to ensure that climate action addresses the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable while contributing to development that is truly sustainable,” he continued. “Development and peace are two sides of the same coin.”

A slate of upcoming UN conferences this year –on financing for development in July, and on climate change in December, as well as a summit-level meeting in New York this coming September – will seek to tackle the linked challenges of sustainable development and the threat of climate change.

Mr. Ban reiterated, however, that the growing security challenges around the world and in areas of simmering tensions where UN peacekeeping missions are based posed an equal menace to global prosperity.

Speaking at the Viet Nam Peacekeeping Centre, established one year ago, the Secretary-General applauded the Vietnamese contribution to 'blue helmet' operations adding that it stood as “powerful proof of Viet Nam's commitment to our world.”

“All of you are proud representatives of your country on the global stage,” he concluded.

“People struggling with instability will look to you for help and hope. We stand with you as you build on this important start to create a strong record of saving lives, stabilizing communities and creating a more peaceful world.”

The Secretary-General is set to depart Viet Nam today and is scheduled to travel to Ireland tomorrow where he will receive the Tipperary International Peace Award and meet with the country's leadership and a cross section of Irish civil society.

Senior UN official voices deep concern about human rights challenges in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

23 May - Concern about the shrinking of the democratic space in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ivan Šimonović, has stressed the importance of broadening the dialogue that has begun between the Government and the opposition.

“I am deeply concerned by serious challenges to the rule of law and the shrinking of the democratic space in the country,” Mr. Simonovic said in a press statement issued yesterday at the end of a two-day visit to the country.

“Far-reaching improvements are needed in areas such as judicial independence, media freedom and the separation of state institutions from party influence, as different UN human rights mechanisms have previously highlighted,” he added.
The release of wiretapped conversations and the political crisis that developed around them had brought many human rights issues clearly into focus, he noted.

The Assistant Secretary-General also urged prompt, comprehensive and impartial investigations into both the recent clashes in Kumanovo and the wire-tapping case.

“Despite these significant challenges, there are some grounds for optimism,” said Mr. Šimonović. “I welcome the opening of a dialogue between the Government and the opposition to defuse tensions and address the current crisis. In addition, it is crucial to broaden this dialogue to include civil society. This is vital to build trust and engage the public in resolving the crisis.”

In addition, continued the senior official, “there is consensus among political actors, civil society and the public that the best hope for the country's future lies in practical reforms to foster a diverse and multi-ethnic society in which human rights are equally respected for all. I am encouraged by the inter-ethnic solidarity demonstrated by the public in recent weeks.”

“There is a lot of homework that remains to be done here,” continued Mr. Šimonović. “It is a shared responsibility among all actors of this country. Furthermore, implementing the reforms related to European Union accession and within the international human rights framework would help to move forward and overcome these challenges. The United Nations supports the country and its people and stands ready to assist wherever it can,” Simonovic concluded.

During his visit, Mr. Šimonović held high-level discussions with authorities and other stakeholders on the current political situation as it relates to relevant human rights considerations.

**UN expert calls on Serbia to expedite legal measures amid housing crisis**

26 May - Amid a range of structural challenges, including high unemployment and poverty, Serbia is now also facing a housing crisis which demands an immediate Government response, according to a United Nations independent human rights expert.

“Serbia urgently needs a national law on housing that fosters non-discrimination and inclusion and that complies with its international human right obligations,” Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, said in a press release today following her week-long visit to the country.

“This new law must take seriously issues of availability, affordability and security of tenure for all, especially for vulnerable groups,” she continued. “And it must be firmly grounded in international human rights law and standards.”

Serbia’s large public housing stock was privatized in the early 1990s and sold to individuals and families at symbolic prices leading to a high-rate of homeownership, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). However, the agency noted, homeownership does not guarantee adequate housing.

Ms. Farha pointed out, in fact, that homeowners and renters alike had indicated that heating, electricity bills and other housing charges remain “simply unaffordable” while some renters had even received eviction notices due to arrears.

In addition, the Special Rapporteur said she learned of “deplorable housing conditions” experienced by vulnerable groups with “distinct housing needs,” such as persons with disabilities, the young, the elderly, women suffering domestic violence, and migrants and refugees from Africa and the Middle East.

“In my view, some significant housing issues of the past remain unresolved,” she continued. “Roma housing conditions are egregious; they continue to be targeted for eviction with its devastating consequences. Allowing this to continue exacerbates discrimination, stigmatization and exclusion.”
Serbia has an obligation to ensure that housing is protected as a legal right that everyone, especially the most vulnerable, can claim, Ms. Farha added.

Independent experts or special rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

**Pause in Syria fighting critical for farmers to harvest crops, get it to those in need – UN**

26 May - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has called for humanitarian pauses in Syria so farmers can safely harvest and transport crops within the country to reach all Syrians in need.

“With indications that the 2015 harvest in Syria may exceed the last two years’ harvests at a time of massive food insecurity and internal displacement, it is paramount that crops are not lost and that food stays within the country,” said WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin in a statement released today.

“We must support unhindered and unrestricted food transport across frontlines; this will ensure food now available in one part of the country reaches Syrians wherever they are in the country,” she added.

“Farmers need peace to harvest and to move their produce to markets. I am urging all sides to allow this to happen,” Ms. Cousin said.

Without a humanitarian pause by all sides, providing unhindered access to Syrian food and opening up corridors for transport, people will still go hungry despite a good harvest, and prices for food will remain high, she warned.

Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria who addressed a WFP Executive Board meeting in Rome on Monday, applauded the call.

“I strongly welcome and support the appeal by WFP. The Syrian people have shown incredible resilience and determination in going through this terrible conflict; they should be given a chance to make sure their own crops can reach their own people safely during this critical period,” said Mr. de Mistura.

Some 12.2 million people, including 5.6 million children, need humanitarian assistance throughout Syria. And by conservative estimates, more than 220,000 Syrians have died in the conflict, but that number is likely much higher.
Ban praises Ireland’s ‘compassionate leadership’ on migration and refugees

26 May - As he wrapped up a visit to Ireland today, the Secretary-General congratulated the country on its “fruitful and strong” relationship with the United Nations over the past 60 years and looked forward to a continued partnership as the world tackled several significant challenges.

“Ireland has been a steadfast supporter of peacekeeping and an important contributor across the global agenda,” said Ban Ki-moon during a press encounter with Enda Kenny, the Prime Minister of Ireland. “Today, Ireland’s support is more needed than ever.”

Mr. Ban outlined the agenda of a constructive meeting he had just held with Mr. Kenny, noting that, along with discussing development, climate change, peacekeeping and human rights, they also tackled the growing challenge of migration and refugee protection.

“I highly commend such compassionate leadership of Taoiseach Kenny with regard to the resettlement of many refugees who are in need of such help,” said Mr. Ban. “We need a comprehensive approach to this challenge that looks at the roots and protects human rights.”

He said he had seen on his visit some of the support that Ireland provides in resettling people who have fled some of the world’s conflict areas, including Syria and Afghanistan.

The Secretary-General said he urged European leaders to address migration in a more comprehensive and collective way and he stressed the importance of compassion in handling the situation. The main priority was to save lives of those without the means to protect themselves through further strengthened search-and-rescue operations, life-saving humanitarian assistance and addressing the root causes of the migration.

“I know that the Irish Government has dispatched a naval vessel and that I really appreciate,” he said, calling for the responsibility to be borne by more than just one or two countries that are affected and saying that he would try to engage with the European Union leadership and Commissioners on the issue.

Mr. Ban and Mr. Kenny also discussed several other issues, including Ireland’s co-facilitation of negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.

“Ireland is a valuable partner in our efforts to eradicate poverty, hunger and inequality,” he said. “I especially appreciate the tremendous efforts made by Ireland to continue official development assistance, despite the difficult economic situation.”

Mr. Ban added his congratulations on the result of the marriage equality referendum, promising that the UN would continue its efforts to promote human dignity for all through the Free & Equal campaign.