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Ban reiterates condemnation of Boko Haram attacks, urges efforts to combat terrorist threat

27 February - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today reiterated his strong condemnation of the continuing indiscriminate and horrific attacks by Boko Haram against civilian populations in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

“The abduction and use of children, including as ‘suicide bombers,’ is particularly abhorrent,” the Secretary-General stated today in a statement issued by his spokesperson, saying that he is encouraged by the positive steps taken by the countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and Benin, with the support of the African Union, towards operationalizing the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to counter the threat.

In the statement, Mr. Ban also called on international partners to provide support to regional efforts and urged the states involved to ensure that all measures taken to combat the terrorist threat of Boko Haram are conducted in line with international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law.

The Secretary-General said he is concerned by the impact of combat operations on local populations in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria and called on countries of the region to give the highest priority to the protection of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, including by providing them with life-saving support.

“The United Nations is scaling up its humanitarian operations and increasing its human rights monitoring in the affected countries,” today’s statement said, adding that the Secretary-General is convinced that a military approach alone “will not suffice” to counter the Boko Haram insurgency.

Only through a multi-dimensional approach that addresses legitimate grievances, past and current human rights violations,
and root causes of the conflict, will the international community be able to effectively respond to the barbaric threat posed by Boko Haram to regional peace and security and to local populations.

According to news reports, explosions in Nigeria's north central city of Jos and the northeastern town of Biu over the past two days have killed at least 34 people. On Wednesday, a suicide bombing in the northeast Nigerian town of Biu reportedly killed about 19 people and injured 17.

**Urging international action, UNESCO chief condemns ISIL’s ‘cultural cleansing’ in Iraq**

27 February - The head of the United Nations agency mandated to protect heritage sites has reiterated her dismay at the “destructive fury” exhibited by militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in their recent assault on the Mosul Museum.

Briefing journalists at a press conference earlier this morning, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director-General, Irina Bokova, condemned the devastation of artefacts and bas-reliefs, including large statues from the UNESCO world Heritage site of Hatra, by ISIL.

“This tragedy is far from just a cultural issue: it’s an issue of major security,” she declared.

“We see clearly how terrorists use the destruction of heritage in their strategy to destabilize and manipulate populations so that they can assure their own domination.”

Ms. Bokova, who has urged Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the UN Security Council to meet on ISIL’s rampant destruction of cultural heritage, said she was encouraged by “the strong international mobilization” against the group’s actions and warned that the “deliberate destruction” of cultural heritage is a war crime according to the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). She added that she had already contacted ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda “to attract her attention to the attacks on the Mosul Museum and encourage her to open a case.”

ISIL extremists have reportedly engaged in “cultural cleansing” across Iraq and other territories occupied by the group, including the destruction of religious heritage belonging to Muslim, Christian and Jewish sects alike. At the same time, they also participate in the illicit traffic of artefacts in order to help fund their terrorist acts.

At the press conference, the Director-General also confirmed that UNESCO is preparing to launch a coalition of partners to stop the illegal trade of cultural heritage with its first meeting to be held at the agency’s headquarters in Paris, France.

“I can announce today that UNESCO is going to launch a coalition against the illicit traffic cultural artefacts,” she continued.

“We are going to organize, here at our headquarters, within the next few weeks a first meeting with our key partners to assure the implementation of this resolution,” she said referring to a UN Security Council measure unanimously adopted two weeks ago, which urged global cooperation in targeting sources of funding for ISIL and Al-Nusra Front (ANF), and condemned those buying oil from the groups, banned all trade in looted antiquities from Iraq and Syria, and called on States to end ransom payments.

The resolution, which called on UNESCO, Interpol, and other international organizations to assist in such efforts, was at the time welcomed by Ms. Bokova as a “milestone for enhanced protection of cultural heritage in Iraq and Syria.”
‘Women must be at the decision-making table at all levels’ UN tells high-level meeting in Chile

27 February - The world must unite to end violence and discrimination against women and girls, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged at a high-level event in Chile on women and decision-making at a today, citing that progress over the past two decades has been made slow and uneven.

“We must work together to empower women and expand opportunities in politics, business and beyond,” Mr. Ban told participants at today’s High-level Conference on ‘Women in Power and Decision-making: Making a World of Difference,’ in Santiago co-hosted by Chile’s Government and UN Women.

This resolve must be backed up with resources because investments in gender equality yield great returns across society, said Mr. Ban emphasizing that 2015 is a “vital year” for advancing all these goals.

The Secretary-General’s remarks come ahead of the worldwide commemoration on 8 March of International Women’s Day, which this year coincides with the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, which remains the “international blueprint” for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Also this year, the international community is hard at work on establishing a new sustainable development agenda that builds on the landmark UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and that will help shape policies and social investments for the next generation.

“It is my firm conviction that women must be at the decision-making table at all levels. We all must do our part to break the glass ceilings and open the doors of opportunity,” said Mr. Ban. “To be truly transformative, the post-2015 development agenda must prioritize gender equality and women’s empowerment. Women’s voices and full participation is central.”

On the side-lines of the conference, the Secretary-General met with Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile, who in 2010, was the first to lead the then newly-created UN Women. He thanked the Chilean Government for co-hosting the conference on ‘Women in power and decision-making’ and also expressed appreciation for the different measures Chile has taken toward women’s empowerment.

The Secretary-General and President Bachelet also exchanged views about the importance of gender equality in the framework of the post-2015 development agenda. They agreed on the importance of good preparatory work for the Financing for Development Conference in Addis-Ababa in July, stressing that private sector engagement would be key to its success.

Mr. Ban expressed his appreciation to Chile for hosting a regional preparatory Conference for this event.

The Secretary-General further noted good progress on the climate change agenda, leading to what he was confident would be a successful outcome at the Paris Summit on the subject in December.
Mali: UN, partners launch humanitarian appeal as relief efforts continue

27 February - The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has joined with partner agencies to launch a multy0million dollar appeal for urgent funding for aid operations in Mali amid the country’s ongoing crisis, a spokesperson said today.

"Despite the progress in reconstructing and stabilizing conflict-affected areas in the north of Mali, the persisting insecurity affects the resumption of basic social services and the restart of economic activities. Hundreds of thousands of people still need humanitarian aid to survive" said said David Gressly, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Mali.

The Government in Mali has been seeking to restore stability and rebuild following a series of setbacks since early 2012, including a military coup d'état, renewed fighting between Government forces and Tuareg rebels, and the seizure of its northern territory by radical Islamists.

Throughout much of this time, Mali’s north has remained restive and, in recent months, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA) and its “blue helmets” have come under repeated violent attack.

Addressing journalists in Geneva, OCHA’s Jens Laerke noted that at the peak of the crisis, more than 500,000 people had left the north of Mali to seek refuge in the south or in neighbouring countries. Although nearly 400,000 had already returned, they continued to face challenges in restarting their lives as communities had become more vulnerable, livelihoods had deteriorated, and social services were working only partially, especially in rural areas.

At the same time, the spokesperson warned, Mali continued to face a high level of food insecurity and malnutrition – a problem affecting countries throughout Africa’s Sahel region. According to UN estimates, nearly 2.6 million people in Mali, or 15 per cent of the total population, will suffer from food insecurity this year while more than one in 10 children would be affected by acute malnutrition.

To support an exit to the crisis, Mr. Laerke added, the UN’s three-year humanitarian response plan would move forward along a two-pronged approach meeting the needs of the most vulnerable people while at the same time working to strengthen livelihoods and community resilience.

In addition, the plan focuses on reinforcing the abilities of national partners and state structures in an effort to lay the foundations for a sustainable transition from humanitarian response to development initiatives.

UN officials welcome release by Somali pirates of longest-held hostages

27 February - Senior United Nations officials have welcomed the release this week of four Thai nationals after nearly five years in captivity, bringing an end to the longest held hostage ordeal in the east African nation thanks to a mission carried by the UN anti-crime agency.

The mission to recover the hostages was conducted by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), funded by the Contact Group for Piracy off the Coast of Somalia’s Trust Fund.

The crew, all Thai nationals, of the FV Prantalay 12 vessel, who were taken at sea by Somali pirates on 18 April 2010, were released on Wednesday by their captors into the hands of the Somali Regional Administration in Galmudug.
The FV Prantalay 12, a Taiwanese flagged fishing vessel, was used by the pirates as a ‘mother ship’ before it eventually capsized in July 2011. The remaining crew were then taken ashore.

Of the original 24 crew members, six succumbed to illness at various stages of captivity, and 14 Myanmar crew members were released to the Puntland Maritime Police authorities and were repatriated by the UNODC’s Hostage Support Programme in May 2011.

While this is indeed good news, many more hostages remain in the hands of Somali pirates. A further 26 hostages are currently being held, having been abducted from the FV Naham 3. The UNODC Hostage Support Programme is also supporting these victims in similar ways such as contact, proof of life and occasional medical visits funded by the Oceans Beyond Piracy.

“We are extremely relieved to have obtained the release of these four Thai hostages, but let us not forget the remaining 26 Asian crewman still being held in Somalia. They need to be returned home to their families. We are striving to make that happen,” said a UNODC spokesperson.

He added: “I am hugely grateful to the Galmudug state officials who conducted this mission yesterday. They put their lives at risk to bring these poor crewmen home after nearly five long years.”

Nicholas Kay, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and head of the UN Assistance Mission in the country (UNSO), said: “I am grateful to see the longest held hostages released from Somalia, and thank all those involved who made it happen, especially the regional authorities in Galmudug.”

Humanitarian community must move quickly to halt cholera spread in Malawi – UN

27 February - With 39 cases of cholera in the last two weeks, including two deaths, the United Nations children’s agency in Malawi is on high alert for spread in southern border areas where highly-populated camps for people displaced by the floods are located, according to a press statement released today.

With Malawi’s Ministry of Health having confirmed the cases – the first in the last three years – there are serious concerns that a rapid spread of infection could lead to a larger outbreak that already over-burdened health services may not be able to contain.

“As humanitarian actors in Malawi, we need to move quickly to stop any further spread of this disease,” said UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Representative in Malawi, Mahimbo Mdoe. “These displaced populations are extremely vulnerable, particularly those with low-immunity, such as malnourished children.

UNICEF is working to support the Government with mobile health services, as well as safe water, sanitation and hygiene services, which are critical factors in preventing the spread of cholera.”

Cholera poses a serious public health problem to populations in crowded environments, especially those with inadequate water and sanitation resources. The disease is endemic in Malawi, though the country’s last major outbreak was in 2009, when well over 1,000 people were infected, but concerns have been raised by reports of more than 3,400 cholera deaths, and 37 deaths, in Mozambique – which borders Malawi – in the past two months.

Both countries have been heavily affected by flooding in recent months. In Malawi alone, 230,000 people are still displaced as the rains continue. A total of 172 people are still missing.

Those infected with cholera can initially show minimal or no symptoms, but can still be contagious. Patients experience diarrhoea, vomiting and, in the advanced stages of the disease, severe dehydration. The disease can kill within hours if not properly treated and is especially dangerous for young children.
UNICEF is working with partners, including Malawi’s Government and the World Health Organization (WHO) to monitor the situation daily and the agency’s Chief of Health in Malawi, Kyaw Aung, says every effort has been made to prepare for a major outbreak.

“UNICEF has dispatched protective equipment, 30 cholera beds, 15 isolation tents, medicines, IV fluids and 1,450 bottles of chlorine in health facilities,” said Mr Aung. “In addition, UNICEF has partnered with various government and non-governmental bodies, including MSF, GOAL Malawi and Red Cross, to implement health care services, health education on cholera, as well as hygiene promotion within the camps.”

‘Political will, steady action’ can end violence against children, UN envoy tells Indonesia

27 February - During her visit this week to Jakarta, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Marta Santos Pais, stressed that violence against children is never justified and commended Indonesia for addressing the scourge.

“Violence against children is a global phenomenon. It happens in all countries and in all groups of society – including in Indonesia. It’s often hidden in plain sight, and in many cases socially condoned,” Ms. Santos Pais said today.

"But let’s be clear,” she added, “Violence against children is never justified and all violence against children can be effectively prevented. With strong political will, wide mobilization and steady action, it can be brought to an end.”

Welcoming Indonesia’s National Medium Term Development Plan which is scheduled to run until 2019, Ms. Santos Pais urged the Government to put in place strong mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of goals and clear accountability and monitoring methods, and to allocate an adequate budget across all sectors to prevent violence against children.

She also expressed her hopes that Indonesia would be a champion for elimination of violence against children to be at the heart of the new sustainable development goals (SDGs). The draft SDGs include a number of targets aimed at eliminating violence against girls and boys including harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.

“I would like to invite Indonesia to take on a leading role and be a ‘lighthouse’ in the region when it comes to shaping policies and the overall agenda to end violence against children,” she said.

In order to achieve this, Ms. Santos Pais recommended the finalization of a national strategy and action plan on violence against children, highlighting that 90 countries across the globe already have such dedicated strategies and national action plans in place. Key to its success would be to involve young people in the development and implementation.

She further welcomed that Indonesia already outlawed various forms of violence against children including violence in institutions, in the community and in schools. However, legislation currently does not explicitly prohibit all forms of violence, including corporal punishment within the home, she said, urging the Government to join the group of 45 countries whose legislation includes a complete prohibition of violence against children in all forms.

Ms. Santos Pais stressed the need to initiate a broad public debate about the negative impact of violence against children.

“In Sweden, for instance, which was the first country to outlaw violence against children in 1979, the new legislation was accompanied by intensive discussion across the country to raise awareness and facilitate the understanding of families and communities how violent behaviour towards children can be prevented. Further to this, families need support to learn how to adopt positive parenting practices that don’t use violence to discipline children,” she said.

During her mission to Indonesia, which started on Monday, Ms. Santos Pais exchanged views with Parliamentarian Ledia Hanifa, had meetings with Minister of Social Affairs Khofifah Indar Parawansa, Minister of Women’s Empowerment and
Child Protection Johana Susana Yembise and Minister of National Development Planning Andrinof Chaniago.

No nationwide data on the extent of violence against children is available in Indonesia. Existing evidence however indicates that violence is a hidden reality in the lives of many of the more than 80 million children in Indonesia.

**Partnerships ‘central’ to post-2015 agenda, says UN Economic, Social Council President**

27 February - Partnerships involving Government, the private sector, civil society, academia and philanthropic organizations will prove central to implementation of the new development agenda, the President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council said this morning as he opened a special event on Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships at UN Headquarters in New York.

“‘The Council has, for a number of years, placed increased emphasis on ways in which to mobilize such partnerships,’” said Martin Sajdik, President of ECOSOC. “‘We must continue to expand this important collaboration as we transition to a new set of development goals.’”

In September 2015, the United Nations will adopt a new transformative development agenda that will focus on people and the planet and be grounded in human rights. It has been agreed in principle that multi-stakeholder partnerships will play an important role in implementation.

The half-day event aimed at discussing ways in which multi-stakeholder partnerships could best align with and support the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda, as well as the type of sustainable framework and platform for reviewing progress that will be required.

Mr. Sajdik said partnerships had become increasingly integral to the UN’s work, “mushrooming” over the past two decades, and taking many different forms. While they were important on the global level, it was also essential to make them work at the national level.

“As we look for new and innovative ways in which to harness the potential benefits of multi-stakeholder partnerships, we have to ask ourselves how such partnerships should look like and how to best link them to the Post-2015 development agenda,” he said.

Review mechanisms would be particularly important for assessing the delivery of results, he said, adding that mechanisms would be put in place to assess progress made and that they should focus on national level implementation.

At the same time, he noted that is conscious of the need to avoid having too many different implementation and review mechanisms, as that could turn out counterproductive and negatively affect oversight.

Following Mr. Sajdik’s opening remarks, a set of panel discussions on partnerships went ahead, the first of which provided insights and perspectives on ways to align multi-stakeholder partnerships with the post-2015 development agenda.
UN expert applauds US decision guaranteeing ‘net neutrality’

27 February - The United States Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) decision to establish new regulations protecting so-called net neutrality, or the equal treatment of all Internet traffic, is “a real victory” for freedom of expression and access to information, a United Nations human rights expert said today.

“I hope the new rules may serve as a model for other governments seeking to protect or expand an open and secure Internet,” the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression, David Kaye, explained in a news release.

“It is especially important that the new rules prevent ISPs [internet service providers] from discriminating against some types of content in favour of others, either by slowing down delivery speeds or by creating a fast lane to ensure quicker delivery for only some content providers that have paid extra fees.”

With the FCC decision, the United States (US) joins a small number of countries – Brazil, Chile, and the Netherlands – that have adopted net neutrality rules in an effort to support “a free and open” Internet and ensure continued access to any lawful content individuals choose, “without restriction or interference from ISPs.

In addition, the decision classifies broadband Internet as a public utility, permitting its regulation by the FCC similar to the way the agency regulates telephone service and other utilities.

Net neutrality’s importance has been long debated by law and technology experts. In instances where it is not applied, ISPs may, at their own initiative or through governmental pressure, charge fees when granting speedier traffic to websites or discriminate against particular content by slowing down or blocking access to certain websites.

“It was by no means assured that the FCC would adopt these rules after years of consideration and public comment,” Mr. Kaye continued, as he urged all States to revisit their own Internet policies and consider similar action in guaranteeing net neutrality to their citizens.

“Moving forward, I hope that implementation of the rules will be marked by the same openness that led to the rules themselves.”

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.

Yemen: closely monitoring ‘critical situation,’ UN rights office urges meaningful dialogue

27 February - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said today that it is closely monitoring the critical situation in Yemen where the political dialogue is faltering and urged a meaningful dialogue to avoid further instability.

“In the context of the many mass demonstrations over the past few months, we have documented a number of unlawful arrests, arbitrary detention and the targeting of journalists,” said OHCHR spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani at a press briefing in Geneva this afternoon.

“One protestor was killed in Ibb last week, when special forces under the control of the
Houthis reportedly used live ammunition to disperse demonstrations,” she added.

“So far, no investigations appear to have been initiated into such violations and abuses, fuelling a long-standing lack of accountability for violations committed in Yemen in recent years.”

OHCHR said it has shared these concerns with relevant authorities, in particular its call for justice and accountability for human rights violations and abuses.

“It is crucial that all sides exercise restraint and work to resolve the political impasse in a peaceful manner and to avoid the situation from spiralling out of control,” Ms. Shamdasani said.

### Agriculture in Caribbean vital to economic growth, sustainable development, says UN official

#### 27 February

The head of the United Nations agriculture agency underlined yesterday the huge importance of agriculture and farming to countries of the Caribbean during an address to Heads of Government at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) summit in the Bahamas.

“Strengthening agriculture and increasing support to small-scale and family farming will help ensure greater sufficiency in local food production, protecting your economies from external price shock,” the FAO Director-General, José Graziano da Silva, told the audience, noting the need to meet challenges like climate challenges and to create jobs, particularly for youth.

Mr. Graziano da Silva described agriculture and family farming as “drivers of inclusive economic growth and sustainable development,” and noted how they can create new employment opportunities and be linked to the tourism industry, an important source of revenue for many Caribbean countries.

He stressed also the substantial progress made through efforts made in the past two decades by CARICOM members to combat hunger and malnutrition, with Barbados, Guyana, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname among the 70 developing countries to have already met the Millennium Development Goals hunger target of halving the proportion of hungry people by 2015.

“Let’s be inspired by these success stories, because a lot remains to be done,” he told the assembled leaders, continuing to note that hunger is only one of the faces of malnutrition, with obesity, which affects over 500 million adults, the other extreme of poor nutrition.

“This is an issue of concern in the Caribbean and FAO is assisting CARICOM countries design and implement strategies, policies and plans of action that tackle the multiple dimensions of malnutrition,” he said, pointing to Action Plans already approved in Belize, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, and St Lucia, and awaiting approval in most remaining countries of the region.

On several efforts to boost security, South-South cooperation was prominent, with Brazil having developed a strong cooperation programme focusing on food security and nutrition, supporting and linking family farming to the provision of school meals, and several other cooperative initiatives in place to protect food production, such as Cuba's assistance in the fight against the Black Sigatoka banana plague.

Pointing to food price increases that were impacting food import bills for CARICOM countries, he noted also the particular vulnerability of countries in the region to extreme events like hurricanes, and the impact of climate change, which increased the frequency, violence and unpredictability of such events and heightened the threat posed to the region’s agriculture, food security and sustainable development.

Mr. Graziano da Silva said the FAO was working with governments and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management
Agency (CDEMA) to build resilience, strengthen capacities and mobilize resources to deal with the impact of natural disasters.

“In few places is the impact of climate change so evident as in Small Island Developing States. For SIDS, climate change is not just an urgent issue. It is a question of survival,” he said. “FAO is here to work with you to be a partner in the road to achieving sustainable development.”

At UN-backed meeting, West African nations commit to ending statelessness

27 February - Delegates representing fifteen West African nations have pledged to step up efforts towards eliminating statelessness in a move aimed at resolving the situation of hundreds of thousands of stateless people across the region, the United Nations refugee agency reported today.

The news comes on the heels of a UN-backed high-level meeting held this week in Côte d’Ivoire which saw the 15 countries belonging to the Economic Community of West African States, or ECOWAS, adopt a declaration on Wednesday aimed at “the prevention, reduction and elimination of statelessness.”

According to a UNHCR press release, the declaration contains 25 commitments and highlights the need for ECOWAS states to gather “concrete information on the causes of statelessness” and the number of stateless people in the region. Estimates suggest that some 750,000 people are currently stateless or at risk of statelessness across West Africa, including 700,000 in Côte d’Ivoire alone.

In addition, the declaration stresses that every child should acquire a nationality at birth and that all foundlings be considered nationals of the state in which they are found. Moreover, it also focuses on the need to ensure that men and women have equal rights to acquire, change and retain their nationality and pass on nationality to their children.

Delivering his closing remarks to the conference, UNHCR head António Guterres welcomed West Africa's commitment to ending statelessness – a scourge which the UN agency has also committed to resolving.

“Ultimately, the concept of 'belonging' goes beyond legal texts and identity documents, and also requires political will to build tolerance and acceptance, and the social and human space for all members of society to be recognized, to contribute and to belong,” Mr. Guterres declared.

Last November, UNHCR launched its global #IBelong campaign with the hope of ending the problem of statelessness within a decade.

The UN agency has noted that new risks of statelessness have, in fact, emerged as a result of growing numbers of major conflicts worldwide. The wars in the Central African Republic and Syria, for example, have forced millions of people into internal displacement or into becoming refugees.

In addition, tens of thousands of children have been born in exile, and UNHCR is working closely with the governments and partners in countries receiving refugees on prioritizing birth registration for those children.

While issues of statelessness remain politically contentious in some countries, in others ending it can be as simple as changing a few words in a country's citizenship law, the press release notes.

Over the past decade, 4 million stateless people have been able to acquire a national or have their nationality confirmed as a result of legislative and policy changes. Nevertheless, there are currently more than 10 million people around the world who are believed to be stateless.

“Having a nationality is something most people take for granted – but to those who do not have one, or who cannot prove it,
this lack often sentences them to a life of discrimination, frustration and despair,” Mr. Guterres concluded.