Aboard Italian navy ship, Ban urges collective action address plight of migrants risking lives on Mediterranean

27 April - The Mediterranean Sea has sadly become “a sea of tears, a sea of misery,” said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today aboard an Italian naval ship, where he called on the global community to unite and take action to address the root causes of the migrant crisis.

“That is very sad. I think it seems to be the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War,” Mr. Ban said in his remarks on board the San Giusto in Sicily, Italy.

“It is because [of a] lack of opportunity, their pursuit for peace and a better future. We have to care for them,” he added about the migrants.

According to the UN, some 219,000 refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean in 2014, and at least 3,500 lives were lost. So far this year, more than 30,000 people are known to have made crossings to Italy and Greece – the first and second largest countries of arrival respectively. And numbers have recently been picking up further as sea and weather conditions improve.

Focused on the growing crisis, Mr. Ban, on an official visit to Italy, arrived in Rome this morning to meet with Italian and European leaders. Later in the day, he travelled to Sicily with Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini to get a first-hand look at Italian naval operations to protect people on the high seas.
“I know it is a huge challenge for the Italian Government and, in a broader sense, European governments. Not a single country – like Italy – can bear all this responsibility,” the UN chief stressed, emphasizing the need for a more united front to focus on saving lives of those who are at sea.

Critical to that is finding a political solution, on the ground, particularly in Libya and all the political instability in northern Africa. The European Union (EU), a group of countries that has “maximum capacity and willingness,” must continue its leadership on this issue, he said, pledging support from the United Nations.

“As Secretary-General of the United Nations and also concerned departments and agencies, particularly the High Commissioner for Refugees, we are ready to work with you. First of all, we have to stop and prevent human trafficking. This is criminal,” Mr. Ban stressed.

“So many thousands of people have lost their lives in their pursuit for a better future. I know why they have been risking their lives despite very difficult challenges,” he continued. “They are the most vulnerable and poorest people, in fact. They do not have any means.”

The UN chief also thanked Prime Minister Renzi and his Government for its “compassionate leadership” and for “bearing the brunt” of the crisis and commended EU High Representative Mogherini for strong leadership to address this problem.

“I really appreciate your hard work, despite limited resources and capacity. But only your commitment and hard work can handle this matter,” Mr. Ban also told the officers.

Today’s briefing was an “invaluable experience,” he said, pledging to raise voice” for collective responsibility and sharing of responsibility and burden in the name of humanity.

“We have to help them and you can help them with your compassion,” Mr. Ban said.

### Nepal: UN agencies rush supplies to earthquake survivors amid powerful aftershocks

27 April - The United Nations refugee agency announced today that it is rushing critical supplies to Nepal in the wake of the devastating earthquake that has reportedly killed more than 3,000 people and injured thousands more on Saturday, and pledged that it ready to provide any assistance needed to help survivors through these difficult times.

“We are deeply saddened that thousands of people have been killed, injured or displaced in the disaster. These numbers are still rising with frequent aftershocks and as search and rescue teams reach remote areas,” said Daisy Dell, Director of the Asia-Pacific bureau of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

“UNHCR stands in solidarity with Nepal, which has been a generous host to thousands of refugees over the years,” she added.

The agency is sending 11,000 plastic sheets and 4,000 solar lanterns from its warehouse in Damak, eastern Nepal, to the eastern hilly districts of Ramechhap, Okhaldhunga and Sindhuli. And later this afternoon, an additional 8,000 plastic sheets and 4,000 solar lamps are being flown to the Nepalese capital, Kathmandu, from Dubai via a cargo plane.

UNHCR will also be providing tarpaulins, which will help shelter earthquake victims whose homes have been destroyed or who are too afraid of aftershocks to return home. In view of the electricity shortage, UNHCR hopes that the solar lamps can provide some light in the affected areas and help to charge mobile phones at a time when families need to communicate urgently.

The UN refugee agency has been working with the Nepali government since the early 1960s to care for refugees from the region and beyond. There are currently more than 21,000 refugees from Bhutan in two camps in eastern Nepal, and some
650 refugees and asylum-seekers in and around Kathmandu.

Meanwhile, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) says it is mobilizing an urgent response to help children and families affected by the earthquake. With children accounting for half the country's population, UNICEF fears the disaster will have a severe impact on children.

UNICEF Thailand Representative, Bijaya Rajbhandari, who is a national of Nepal, happened to be in Kathmandu with his family when the earthquake hit. “It was a terrifyingly strong earthquake,” he said.

“Today, we can see extensive damage to buildings across the city and many people have spent the night outside in the cold because of the ongoing shocks. These people are without basic facilities and the government hospitals are already overcrowded. People need help and they need it now.”

UNICEF says it has prepositioned supplies, including water purification tablets, hygiene kits, tarpaulins and nutrition supplies and is working with government and other partners to meet children’s immediate needs in the areas of water and sanitation, child protection, health and nutrition.

In addition, UNICEF Thailand has launched an appeal for urgent donations from the Thai public to help with the response.

Further to this announcement, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has issued its issued guidelines for donations to the international response through the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) also announced today that it is deploying emergency telecommunication equipment including 35 satellite mobile phones and 10 satellite Broadband Global Area Network terminals along with solar panels and laptops to support relief coordination efforts.

ITU’s Secretary-General Houlin Zhao said that the emergency communication equipment will help restore vital communication links that are essential to coordinate relief and rescue efforts.

“I would like to express my deepest condolences to the people and the Government of Nepal following loss of life even as the toll continues to rise and widespread devastation across the country,” Mr. Zhao added.

Emergency telecommunications also play a critical role in the immediate aftermath of disasters.

“They ensure timely flow of information that is much needed by government agencies and other humanitarian actors involved in rescue operations,” said Brahim Sanou, Director of ITU’s Telecommunication Development Bureau.

According to the UN, initial government reports confirm that 30 out of 75 districts in the country have been affected in the Western and Central Regions, including Kathmandu Valley. This includes mountainous and hilly terrain in areas where rural populations are widely dispersed as well as some very densely populated cities.
UN agency unveils alternative policy agenda to transform economies, make gender equality a reality

27 April - A major new report released today in seven locations around the world by the United Nations entity for gender equality and women’s empowerment (UN Women) calls for the transformation of economies to make women’s rights and equality a reality.

The UN Women report, Progress of the World’s Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights, brings together human rights and economic policymaking to call for far-reaching changes to the global policy agenda and imagines what the global economy would look like if it truly worked for women, for the benefit of all.

“Our public resources are not flowing in the directions where they are most needed,” said UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. “For example, to provide safe water and sanitation, quality health care, and decent child- and elderly-care services. Where there are no public services, the deficit is borne by women and girls.”

The report’s publication comes as the international community negotiates a transformative new agenda for sustainable development, 20 years after the landmark Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, China, which set out an ambitious agenda to advance gender equality. Despite significant advances in many societies, particularly in advancing women’s legal rights, millions of women remain consigned to low paid, poor quality jobs, and lack access to health care, clean water and sanitation.

Only half of women participate in the formal global labour force, compared to three quarters of men, with some developing regions showing 95 per cent of women’s employment informal. That includes unpaid care work, for which women carry the burden, and which has intensified thanks to austerity policies and cutbacks.

“This is a care penalty that unfairly punishes women for stepping in when the State does not provide resources,” said Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka. “We need policies that make it possible for both women and men to care for their loved ones without having to forego their own economic security and independence.”

The report makes the case that the alternative economic agenda it outlines would not only create fairer societies, it would also create new sectors of employment, for instance in the care economy.

“The report is very much focused on picturing an economy that in working for women does so through providing them a recognition and valuing of the paid and unpaid care work that they do,” said Lakshmi Puri, the Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, in an interview with UN Radio.

The report makes 10 key recommendations for actions that Governments and others can take to move towards an economy that truly works for women, dismantling a system in which they are paid on average 24 per cent less than men globally.

An economy designed with women’s needs in mind would give them an equal voice in economic decision-making; from the way in which time and money are spent in their households, to the ways in which resources are raised and allocated at the national level, to how broader economic parameters are set by global institutions.

The report sets out a vision of a global economy fit for women, where they have equal access to productive resources and social protection, which provides them with sufficient income to support an adequate standard of living, and where the work they do is respected and valued.

It calls for a paradigm shift in the way governments, financial institutions, businesses and civil society approach economic policy thinking and human rights, to bring about an alternative economic agenda which places women and their rights at its centre.
“Realizing economic and social rights of women enables the transformation of economies and it also enables empowering of all, including men and boys,” said Ms. Puri. “When we ask for the economies to be transformed, it cannot be governance as usual business as usual. The corporate sector must change. It cannot be labour markets as usual.”

**Burundi: UN working to help relocate civilians fleeing election-related violence**

**27 April** - Civil unrest erupted in Burundi this weekend after the ruling party overwhelmingly elected President Pierre Nkurunziza on Saturday as its candidate for the 26 June presidential election, the humanitarian wing of the United Nations reported today, appealing for $11.6 million dollars to plan a response for the influx of people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

President Nkurunziza, who was elected by the ruling party – CNDD-FDD with 88 per cent of the vote, has been in office for two terms since 2005, and a broad array of actors has warned that an attempt to seek a third term is unconstitutional and contrary to the spirit of the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi that ended a decade of civil war in the country.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that public protests resumed today, with various media outlets reporting that five people had been killed since yesterday.

“There has been widespread intimidation and efforts to shut down media outlets, as well as intimidation and arrests of rights activists, notably Pierre Claver Mbonimpa,” OCHA said.

Meanwhile, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Rwanda reported that as of Sunday, 20,408 Burundians had sought refuge in Rwanda over the past two weeks. UNHCR reports that together with the Government of Rwanda, they are working to relocate a total of 16,000 refugees from the two reception centres, Bugesera and Nyanza, to the new Mahama refugee camp by May.

The number of refugees being relocated on a daily basis to the new camp is increasing due to the sharply rising rate of new arrivals (almost 3,000 individuals arriving daily as of 25 April, up from an average of 500 daily arrivals between 16-21 April), overwhelming the two reception centres. UNHCR, the Government and partners are planning for a continued high rate of influx.

Meanwhile, UNHCR in Uvira, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), reports that 4,000 Burundians have sought refuge in the DRC, while UNHCR in Tanzania – which has historically hosted hundreds of thousands of Burundian refugees – reports only 100 arrivals from Burundi thus far.

The newly re-established Burundi Humanitarian Country Team has endorsed a contingency plan for the upcoming elections, requesting $11.6 million to respond to the needs of up to 50,000 people most likely to be affected within the first eight weeks of violence due to elections.

In a worst case scenario, 350,000 people could be in need of humanitarian assistance within six months, added OCHA.

UN Deputy Spokesperson Farhan Haq was asked to comment on the issue during today's noon briefing at Headquarters. He said the world body is following the situation very closely and is “deeply concerned about the violence over the weekend, including a number of deaths” following the announcement that the President would seek a third term.

“We urge a swift investigation into the violence,” he said, adding that Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, is in Bujumbura to convey the organization’s concerns and work with all parties on diffusing tensions.
Gaza: Security Council receives report of Board of Inquiry into incidents during summer conflict

27 April - In a letter transmitting to the Security Council the public summary of a report of the Board of Inquiry regarding incidents in Gaza during the recent conflict, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today expressed his “profound and continuing concern” for civilian populations of the Gaza Strip and Israel.

“The agony of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, and the tragic, decades-long predicament they endure there, is reflected in the report of the Board of Inquiry,” said Mr. Ban in the letter. “We should also bear in mind that Israeli civilians in southern Israel continue to face the threat of rocket and terrorist attacks by Hamas and other militant groups.”

According to the UN spokesperson, Farhan Haq, the Board of Inquiry reviewed and investigated seven incidents, which involved the loss of 44 Palestinian lives, together with at least 227 injured, and damage at UN facilities.

The Board also reviewed three incidents involving weapons found in UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools, including instances in which Palestinian armed groups may have used UNRWA school premises to launch attacks.

With no progress on the critical elements that would secure long-term peace for the people of the region, Mr. Haq said report is a reminder that what is needed is a durable cease-fire, which includes an end to arms smuggling, the opening of the crossings, more progress on the reconstruction of Gaza, and greater steps toward implementing the so-called ‘Beach Camp’ accord, which addresses much-needed Palestinian reconciliation.

Mr. Haq said that the Secretary-General attached even greater importance to finding new momentum in the search for a resolution of the conflict in the Middle East and he stressed the need for resumption of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, calling for support of the process through international engagement.

At meeting on nuclear disarmament, UN chief warns of ‘dangerous return’ to Cold War mentalities

27 April - Progress in working towards global nuclear non-proliferation has stalled and the trend towards “nuclear zero” is reversing, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned today as he called on Member States to urgently ramp up efforts in tackling nuclear disarmament.

“Eliminating nuclear weapons is a top priority for the United Nations,” said Mr. Ban in remarks delivered on his behalf by UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson to the opening plenary meeting of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) earlier this morning. “No other weapon has the potential to inflict such wanton destruction on our world.”

However, the Secretary-General added, instead of progress towards new arms reduction agreements, “we have allegations of destabilizing violations of existing agreements.”

He noted that the danger posed by nuclear weapons continued to persist since the last NPT Review Conference, including with respect to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and cautioned of the growing series of setbacks the Treaty was facing.
“Instead of a Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty in force or a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons, we see expensive modernization programmes that will entrench nuclear weapons for decades to come. Instead of pursuing proposals to accelerate nuclear disarmament, including my Five Point Plan, there has been a dangerous return to Cold War mentalities,” Mr. Ban continued in the remarks. “This reversal is a regression for our world.”

In a separate statement, Yukiya Amano, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), echoed Mr. Ban’s apprehension regarding nuclear proliferation claiming he was “seriously concerned” about the DPRK’s nuclear programme and declaring that his agency remained unable to conclude that “all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities.”

Nevertheless, he said, efforts to render the Middle East free of nuclear weapons continued amid some optimism following a recent forum held on the issue. The ‘Forum on Experience of Possible Relevance to the Creation of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East,’ he explained, had shown that it was possible “to have constructive dialogue on the establishment if a nuclear-weapon-free zone in this region, despite the complexity of the issue and differences of view among States concerned.”

At the same time, Mr. Amano did note that the IAEA’s wide-ranging functions – from monitoring nuclear safety to assisting the UN’s Ebola response – were being successfully carried out around the world.

“The IAEA is working very hard to fulfil its very broad mandate,” Mr. Amano concluded. “The challenges are considerable, but I am confident that we can continue to address them successfully with the support of all our Member States.”

The 2015 Review Conference will run at UN Headquarters in New York through 22 May. The President-designate of the Conference is Ambassador Taous Feroukhi from Algeria.

The NPT is a landmark international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament. It represents the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to the goal of disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States.

**New UN platform aims to bring pastoralists’ voices to global decision-making stage**

27 April - Millions of pastoralists – from the Bedouin of North Africa to the Sherpa in Nepal and Navajo in North America – will benefit from a new online knowledge hub launched today by the United Nations that will help them raise their voices in international policy debates and share valuable information to strengthen their agricultural livelihoods.

Launched by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and its partners, the Pastoralist Knowledge Hub will enable mobile livestock keepers to connect, to meet and discuss issues like agricultural innovations or land regulations and find shared solutions to common challenges, the agency said in a press release.

The online tool also offers a growing database of research on pastoralism, contacts for a worldwide network of pastoral representatives, and discussion forums for pastoralist networks and partnering institutions. It will aim to fill the gaps identified over the past years, especially the lack of global policy discussions on pastoralism and the need to bring attention to the challenges faced by pastoral communities.

“Pastoralists are able to produce food where no crops can be grown. Yet, their concerns are poorly heard by the international community,” said FAO Deputy Director-General Helena Semedo. “This hub is an important platform to help them project their voices, share knowledge, and affect policy debates.”

The new hub also includes a mechanism that lets pastoral communities nominate and select representatives to global forums such as the Committee on World Food Security, according to FAO.
Examples of well-known pastoral societies include the Bedouin of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, the Maasai in East Africa, the Navajo of North America, the Sherpa in Nepal, and Scandinavia's Sami people.

The several hundred million pastoralists who manage the world’s rangelands rely on a rich legacy of traditional knowledge and mobility to survive in the harshest environments on the planet. They remain important producers of livestock, meat, milk, hair and hides and in many countries produce more than half of agricultural gross domestic product (GDP).

The new hub brings together partner institutions including the African Union, the European Union, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank and non-governmental organizations, as well as pastoralist civil society groups.

New UN report finds bulk of world’s rural populations excluded from healthcare access

27 April - The majority of the world’s rural populations continue to live and work without essential healthcare services, in stark contrast to their urban-dwelling counterparts, according to a new report released today by the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO).

The ILO’s findings – published in the Global evidence on inequities in rural health protection report – show that 56 per cent of people living in rural areas worldwide remain bereft of critical healthcare access, with the most acute instances being in Africa where an overwhelming 83 per cent of rural inhabitants are uncovered. The most affected countries are also those which face the highest levels of poverty, the report observes.

“Decades of underinvestment in health interrupted efforts to develop national health systems and ultimately resulted in the neglect of health in rural areas,” Isabel Ortiz, Director of the ILO’s Social Protection Department, confirmed in a press release.

“This study shows that investing in rural health, as part of a national health system, is affordable and yields significant economic and social returns,” she added. “Progress towards universal health protection is possible in any country, irrespective of its level of income.”

At the same time, the report notes that even where healthcare is guaranteed by law, many people in rural areas still struggle to obtain access as such laws are frequently unenforced where they live. Moreover, the situation is worsened by the lack of healthcare workers deployed to rural regions. According to the ILO, in fact, while half the world’s population lives in rural areas, only 23 per cent of the global health workforce is deployed in these areas. Africa and Latin America are the two regions where this situation is most acute.

In addition, persistent underfunding has also been found to be linked to the unavailability of services with financial resource gaps nearly twice as high in rural than in urban areas.

“The lack of legal coverage, insufficient numbers of health workers, inadequate funding, and high [out-of-pocket payments] have created life-threatening inequities in many countries,” explained Xenia Scheil-Adlung, Health Policy Coordinator at the ILO.

“Strengthening both the demand and supply side of services is crucial when moving towards universal health protection, particularly in rural areas. Legal health coverage is necessary but not sufficient. Only when quality services are actually made available and affordable for all those in need can effective access to health care be ensured.”

In its report, the UN agency concludes that only through a comprehensive and systematic approach that simultaneously addresses missing rights, health workers, funding, financial protection and quality of care, can the health access gaps in the world’s rural areas be finally bridged.
“Addressing such inequities needs to consider the specific characteristics of rural populations, including high poverty rates and informality of work,” Ms. Scheil-Adlung continued.

“This means moving from charity to rights, the provision of health workers with decent working conditions that enhance productivity, and the minimization of out-of-pocket payments by patients to avoid poverty. It also requires complementary socio-economic and labour market policies to trigger inclusive economic growth.”

**New sustainability agenda must harmonize man’s relationship with planet – UN Assembly president**

**27 April** - As United Nations Member States prepare to adopt and move toward implementing a new development agenda, the President of the General Assembly said it is critical to ensure that “a harmonious relationship with our planet underpins our quest to achieve sustainable development.”

“This year’s dialogue on Harmony with Nature is timely, as the formulation of an ambitious and transformative development agenda for the next 15 years is under way,” said General Assembly President Sam Kahamba Kutesa as he opened the Assembly’s interactive dialogue on ‘Harmony with Nature: Towards achieving sustainable development goals including addressing climate change in the post-2015 development agenda.’

The development path the world has taken has imposed a heavy cost on our planet, leading to serious environmental degradation, he said, underscoring that “it is now widely accepted that our way of life, especially the production and consumption patterns, is no longer sustainable.”

“As scientists have repeatedly warned, we are severely affecting the Earth’s carrying capacity and are in danger of reaching planetary boundaries or tipping points beyond which we risk irreversible and abrupt environmental changes,” he said.

“We have to adopt a post-2015 development agenda that is holistic in nature,” Mr. Kutesa continued. “The agenda should put the well-being of both humankind and our planet at the centre of our sustainable development efforts.”

He drew attention to the need to reach a new, universal climate change agreement this coming December in Paris that will be another important step for ensuring a better chance of preserving the planet for the present and future generations.

“Through these efforts, we should bear in mind that profound changes in attitudes, behaviours and policies will be required to create a world in which human beings live in harmony with nature.”

Mr. Kutesa acknowledged the increasing awareness and proactive stances being taken by leaders around the world to address the environmental challenges we face.

“Nevertheless,” he said, “much more needs to be done in terms of policy making, technology development and transfer as well as education and capacity building.”

The General Assembly President opened the meeting with a minute of silence in tribute to the victims of those who lost their lives in this weekend’s devastating earthquake in Nepal and surrounding regions including Bangladesh, India and Tibet.

“On behalf of Member States, I extend my deepest sympathies to the people and Government of Nepal, and all others affected by this disaster,” he said. “I thank all those that have offered their support following this disaster and call on the international community to stand in solidarity with the Government of Nepal following this devastating earthquake.”
Cyprus: UN envoy welcomes new Turkish Cypriot leader’s commitment to negotiations

27 April - The Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide, has spoken with Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci, according to the United Nations Good Offices Mission.

In a readout of the two officials’ phone conversation released on Sunday, the Mission said Mr. Eide congratulated Mr. Akinci on his new role and “welcomed his commitment to resuming negotiations as soon as possible.”

The Special Adviser will return to Cyprus from 4 to 8 May in order to continue preparations for the resumption of talks.

UN warns Central African Republic is becoming largest forgotten humanitarian crisis

27 April - The Central African Republic (CAR) is quickly becoming the largest forgotten humanitarian crisis of our time with some 60 percent of its population in need of aid, including nearly 900,000 people forcibly displaced by conflict, but assistance programmes remain “dramatically underfunded,” the United Nations refugee agency said today.

“We must prevent the Central African Republic from becoming a forgotten crisis,” said UN Humanitarian Coordinator Claire Bourgeois was quoted as saying in a press release.

“The current funding for the strategic humanitarian response does not allow us to ensure the protection of all these displaced persons or to provide the minimum of what is needed to meet the huge humanitarian needs,” according to Ms. Bourgeois.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there are more than 460,000 refugees from the CAR in neighbouring countries and some 436,000 people are internally displaced. In the country, a total of 2.7 million people out of a population of 4.6 million are in need of humanitarian aid.

“Yet humanitarian assistance programmes both for the Central African Republic and the Regional Refugee Response Plan remain dramatically underfunded, with funding levels of only 14 per cent for programmes inside CAR and 9 per cent of the refugee programmes in the neighbouring countries,” the UNHCR press release said.

The World Health Organization, meanwhile, said only 55 per cent of the health facilities are functioning in a country that has among the world’s highest child and maternal mortality rates, and noted that other pressing crises like Syria and Yemen are siphoning off critically needed funding from the CAR.

UNHCR and partners are struggling to provide an adequate level of assistance to the refugees in the four neighbouring countries: Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

“It is critical that the international community does not forget about the Central African Republic”, the agency quoted Liz Ahua, its Regional Refugee Coordinator. “Important progress has been made and we cannot allow these gains to be undone because of lack of funding and support.”
Meanwhile, Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, arrived in the CAR capital Bangui over the weekend.

During his four-day visit, Mr. Ladsous will mark the achievement of full operational capability of the UN Mission there known by the French acronym MINUSCA established a year ago to protect civilians and support the transition processes in the CAR. Mr. Ladsous will meet with the transitional authorities, shortly before the opening of the National Bangui Forum on 4 May.

UNHCR said there are two crucial milestones coming up in the peace process: the first will be the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation, bringing all parties together in May to address the political and security issues that lay at the centre of the crisis; and the second will be the national elections scheduled for August.

“The participation of internally displaced people and refugees in both processes will be crucial to their success,” it said.

**Welcoming peaceful presidential election in Togo, Ban calls for continued calm atmosphere**

*27 April* - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today welcomed the peaceful conduct of the presidential election in Togo, which took place on Saturday.

“As Togo awaits the final results, the Secretary-General encourages all political leaders and segments of society to continue to maintain the peaceful atmosphere that has prevailed throughout the electoral process,” said a statement released by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson.

The statement urged all candidates and their supporters to resolve any disputes that might arise through established legal procedures.

**UN agency alarmed by malnutrition among children displaced from Yarmouk camp**

*26 April* - As the United Nations agency tasked with supporting Palestine refugees continued today to provide essential humanitarian assistance to civilians who have been displaced from Yarmouk and to those hosting them, evidence of acute malnutrition was found in a large number of children.

“We are extremely concerned about the patients we are seeing from Yarmouk and what it suggests about health situation inside the camp,” said Christopher Gunness, spokesperson for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

“UNRWA medical personnel established a mobile health point in Yalda near Yarmouk, treating 173 patients over the course of the day,” said Mr. Gunness. “One case of hepatitis A was detected and treated. Medical personnel detected acute malnutrition among three out of nineteen children (under-five) seen, representing a rate of 16 per cent.”

In a situation report it released today, the agency detailed successful humanitarian operations in Yalda, which included provision of 10,000 litres of drinking water and 1,200 bags of bread to Palestinian and Syrian families displaced or affected by conflict, and efforts continue to provide humanitarian assistance to civilians from Yarmouk who remain displaced in Tadamoun.

UNRWA missions deliver a broad range of critical humanitarian materials to each of these families, including food, medical supplies, water purification treatments, mattresses, blankets, family kitchen sets and hygiene kits, and the agency also provides daily hot lunches for all civilians, complemented by regular distribution of canned food.
UN responds to destruction, displacement in wake of Nepal earthquake

26 April - The United Nations relief wing said today that at least 2,200 people have died and over 5,800 are injured as a result of a 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck Nepal on Saturday.

The figures, released by the Nepalese Government Ministry of Home Affairs’ National Emergency Operation Center, and included in the latest situation report released by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) today are the latest available and are expected to rise as search and rescue efforts continue and the total number of people affected by the disaster is determined.

“Time is of the essence for the search and rescue operations,” said Under-Secretary-General of Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, “The actions of the Government of Nepal and local communities themselves have already saved many lives. Teams from India, Pakistan, China and Israel have started work, and more are on their way from the US, the UK, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, the European Union and elsewhere.”

The situation report says that 35 of the 75 districts in Nepal are reported to be affected by the earthquake, with the most affected districts being Dhading, Gorkha, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchowk, Kavre, Nuwakot, Dolakha, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, and Ramechhap.

Ms. Amos said UN agencies were working with humanitarian partners in Nepal, supporting the Government and other partners. The World Food Programme (WFP) was providing food items, The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) was sending tents and healthcare supplies and the World Health Organization (WHO) had distributed medical supplies to cover the immediate needs of 40,000 people.

She added that a UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination team was on the ground helping to coordinate response effort, adding that the Organization would continue supporting the people of Nepal in the weeks and months ahead. People affected by the earthquake are in need of food, water, emergency shelter and healthcare, with many having slept in the open in makeshift tents for two nights.

The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said the earthquake, as well as nearly 60 aftershocks that followed, caused “vast devastation across much of the country,” adding that at least 940,000 children live in areas severely affected by the quake and are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

In a report on the agency’s website, UNICEF stressed the heightened vulnerability of children when access to safe water and sanitation was limited and said children may have become separated from their families.
The report said staff and supplies were mobilizing to meet urgent humanitarian needs, with a focus on water and sanitation, nutrition, education and child protection. Two cargo flights, with a combined 120 tonnes of humanitarian supplies including medical and hospital supplies, tents and blankets, were being readied for urgent airlift to Kathmandu.

Martin Sajdik, the President of the Economic and Social Council, expressed his sadness at the loss of life and sent his condolences to all those affected by the disaster.

“The full scope of the disaster is not yet known but we all know that its cost goes well beyond the damage to property and has immense economic and social impact on Nepali society,” he said. “As a ‘least developed country’, Nepal can ill afford these setbacks on its path to sustainable development.”

He stressed that the tragedy in Nepal underlined the need to make disaster risk reduction a critical component of the post-2015 development agenda and to improve mitigation efforts to minimize the impact of such disasters.

“The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, adopted recently at the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, stressed that: ‘It is urgent and critical to anticipate, plan for and reduce disaster risk in order to more effectively protect persons, communities and countries,’” he said.

He said priorities were assessing the damage, delivering urgently humanitarian assistance and ensuring that development gains are not lost, and he called on the international community as a whole to come to Nepal’s aid and focus on long-term recovery.

**Marking anniversary of Chernobyl disaster, Secretary-General reiterates UN's commitment to those affected**

In a message to mark the 29th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today remembered the hundreds of emergency workers who responded to the accident and the more than 330,000 people uprooted from their homes in its aftermath.

“We stand in solidarity with the millions who have been traumatized by lingering fears about their health and livelihoods,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s Spokesperson. “After nearly three decades, the affected areas in Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation are still suffering from the impact of the accident. However, we can take heart that communities in the affected regions now have a chance and, increasingly, the means, to lead a normal life.”

He drew attention to the fact that the UN proclaimed 2006-2016 a ‘Decade of Recovery and Sustainable Development’ for regions affected by the disaster, and established a UN Action Plan on Chernobyl, all in an effort to advance socio-economic development, promote healthy lifestyles and restore a sense of community self-reliance.

The Decade and Action Plan come to an end on 31 December 2016 and, in response, the UN Development Programme Administrator and the UN Co-ordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl initiated a series of consultations to define the vision for post-2016 international cooperation, providing substantive inputs to the new Secretary-General’s Report on Chernobyl and a General Assembly resolution on Chernobyl.

“On this solemn anniversary, the Secretary-General reiterates the commitment of the United Nations to support those affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster,” said the statement. “He calls for a forward-looking strategy designed to further help the recovery of the affected areas and to work together for greater nuclear safety worldwide.”
Secretary-General appoints new acting Special Representative for UN Mission against Ebola

25 April - The United Nations Secretary-General today announced the appointment of Peter Jan Graaff of the Netherlands as the Secretary-General's Acting Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER).

In his role as Acting Special Representative, Mr. Graaff will work closely with the Special Envoy on Ebola, Dr. David Nabarro, and with the Governments in the region and other partners, according to a statement released today by the Secretary-General's Spokesperson.

Mr. Graaff succeeds Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed of Mauritania, who was today appointed as Mr. Ban's special envoy for Yemen, and the Secretary-General expressed his sincere gratitude to Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed for his exceptional work and leadership of UNMEER, and for his commitment to ensuring the affected countries are on the road to recovery from the unprecedented Ebola outbreak.

Mr. Graaff is currently Ebola Crisis Manager for Liberia, a role in which he has served since October last year, and he brings a wealth of experience in international health issues and international affairs to his new position.

He served extensively with the World Health Organization (WHO) in a number of countries in Africa, and in Afghanistan and Haiti, and led the Civil Affairs and Development team for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

UN chief urges Indonesia not to execute 10 people on death row for drug crimes

25 April - The Secretary-General appealed today to the Government of Indonesia to refrain from carrying out the execution, as announced, of ten prisoners on death row for alleged drug-related crimes.

According to a statement released today by his Spokesperson, the Secretary-General recalled that under international law, if the death penalty is to be used at all, it should only be imposed for the most serious crimes, namely those involving intentional killing, and only with appropriate safeguards.

Drug-related offenses generally are not considered to fall under the category of “most serious crimes,” said the Spokesperson's statement adding that the United Nations opposes the death penalty in all circumstances and concluding with a call by the Secretary-General on President Joko Widodo of Indonesia to urgently consider declaring a moratorium on capital punishment in Indonesia, with a view toward abolition.
Secretary-General appoints Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed as new special envoy for Yemen

25 April - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today appointed Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed of Mauritania as his Special Envoy for Yemen after Jamal Benomar of the United Kingdom stepped down from the role.

In a statement released today, Mr. Ban's Spokesperson said that Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed will work closely with the members of the UN Security Council, the Gulf Cooperation Council, Governments in the region and other partners, as well as the UN Country Team for Yemen.

The statement added that the Secretary-General expresses his sincerest gratitude to Mr. Benomar for his tireless efforts aimed at assisting the Yemeni people in realising their aspirations for change through a peaceful transition.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed moves to his new post from a position as the Secretary-General's Special Representative and Head of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) and prior to that he worked as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Deputy Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), UN Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator and UN Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative.

He has also served as Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Syria and Yemen and held several positions with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), and he brings over three decades of experience in development, humanitarian and political issues with the Government of Mauritania and the UN in Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

UN official in Darfur says mission's peacekeepers acted proportionately in response to attacks

25 April - The African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) today reiterated that its peacekeepers responded proportionately to two attacks launched against them by armed men in Kass, South Darfur, this week.

"In both incidents, UNAMID troops returned fire but did not initiate any shooting; they only acted to protect themselves," said African Union-United Nations Acting Joint Special Representative for Darfur, Abiodun Bashua denying recent media misreporting of the incidents, which took place on 23 and 24 April.

The first attack, on 23 April, took place at around 6:00 p.m., when around 40 gunmen on horses and camels opened fire on Nigerian troops protecting a water point in Kass, 85 kilometres north-west of Nyala, South Darfur. The attackers made off with one of the Mission’s vehicles after shooting the driver. The peacekeepers pursued and recovered the vehicle. Four attackers were killed during the exchange and two peacekeepers injured, along with one of the attackers.

The following morning, a UNAMID patrol travelling from Nyala was attacked near the Mission's base in Kass. Four peacekeepers were injured during the exchange of fire.

Mr. Bashua lamented the loss of life but stressed that the peacekeepers responded appropriately and proportionately, saying the Mission had evidence that the attackers, who were riding on horses and camels, fired AK-47 assault rifles at the peacekeepers.
He regretted that an erroneous version of the events was being put out to misinform the public and the Government and said the Mission’s leadership was continuing to engage with Sudan’s Government, the African Union and the United Nations to defuse the tension and restore normality in Kass.

Since December 2007, when UNAMID was first mandated, a total of 61 peacekeepers have lost their lives in hostile action in Darfur.

**Nepal: Ban sends his condolences after earthquake hits Kathmandu Valley**

25 April - The United Nations Secretary-General has sent his deepest condolences to the Government of Nepal and to everyone affected by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck the country on Saturday.

“The reports of the devastation are still coming in and the numbers of people killed, injured and affected by this earthquake continue to rise,” said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a statement released by his Spokesperson.

The latest situation report released by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs today, said that Nepal’s Government currently reports over 700 deaths with that number expected to rise, and no figures currently available on the total number of people affected.

“It is clear that very many lives have been lost,” said the statement. “There has also been significant damage to Nepal’s irreplaceable cultural heritage.”

Nepal’s Government also reports that 30 of Nepal’s 75 districts were affected, mainly in western and central regions, including the country’s two largest cities, Kathmandu and Pokhara. Hospitals in the Kathmandu Valley are overcrowded, running out of room for storing dead bodies and also running short of emergency supplies.

The most affected districts were reported to be Dhading, Gorkha, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchowk, Kavre, Nuwakot, Dolakha, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, and Ramechhap. UN field offices reported that the eastern region was not badly affected and that the Terrai had been minimally affected.

“On behalf of the United Nations, I thank the first responders in all the affected countries who are working around the clock to save lives,” said the statement. “The United Nations is supporting the Government of Nepal in coordinating international search and rescue operations and is preparing to mount a major relief effort.”

The Government has requested international assistance in the response to the disaster, with particular importance placed on the need search and rescue capacity, medical teams, supplies and tenting for hospitals, heavy equipment for rubble removal and helicopters for transport and access to blocked areas.

The President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, also expressed his deep concern and profound sorrow about the devastating earthquake. He sent his prayers and expresses the sympathy of the family of nations to Government and people of Nepal and all those affected by this disaster.

Mr. Kutesa thanked all countries and entities that have responded to the emergency and he called on Member States and the international community to deploy all possible efforts to urgently assist and support the people and the Government of Nepal in the aftermath of the earthquake.

The Executive Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), Babatunde Osotimehin, also expressed his deepest sympathy to those affected by the earthquake, saying he was “shocked and saddened” by the deaths and disappearance of hundreds of people, as well as the widespread destruction and displacement caused by the disaster.
He added that the UNFPA stood ready to join in international efforts to give assistance to the Government and people of Nepal, expressing particular concern about the fate of pregnant women who have been affected by this tragedy, including those who might face potentially life-threatening complications. All efforts will be exerted to support their safety and the safety of their babies.

**Welcoming progress in fight against malaria, Ban calls for more work to continue momentum**

25 April - In a message to mark World Malaria Day today, the United Nations Secretary-General said that better access to insecticide-treated bed nets and greater availability of accurate diagnostics and effective treatment were the main reasons why the UN health agency reported in 2014 that the rate at which people are dying from malaria had halved since the turn of the century.

“This tremendous achievement is clear proof that we can win the global fight against malaria,” said Ban Ki-moon today. “We have the tools and the know-how. But, we still need to invest in getting these tools to a lot more people if we are to further reduce the number of people becoming ill with malaria, and further cut the number of people who die each year.”

In 2013, which is the most recent year for which statistics are available, almost half of all people at risk of malaria in sub-Saharan Africa had access to an insecticide-treated net, up from just 3 per cent in 2004. Also in 2013, the number of rapid diagnostic tests procured globally increased to 319 million, up from 46 million in 2008 and 392 million courses of artemisinin-based combination therapies – a key intervention to treat malaria – were procured, up from 11 million in 2005.

“As a result, fewer people are becoming infected with malaria, and more people are getting the medicines they need,” said the Secretary-General, who went on to call for increased effort to improve things further to maintain momentum in the fight against the disease.

“We urgently need to get insecticide-treated nets to all people at risk in sub-Saharan Africa – not just half of them,” he said. “We must address the recent decline in indoor residual spraying, another key intervention for reducing new infections. And we have to do more to for the millions of people who cannot get tested and treated for malaria. We must also move more decisively to tackle insecticide and drug resistance.”

He called for more investment in tried and tested approaches to malaria prevention and treatment, strengthening of health systems in the world's poorest countries, and intensification of efforts to develop new tools and approaches.

“We have a real opportunity to defeat this terrible disease,” said Mr. Ban. “Let's not waste it.”