Adopting resolution, Security Council condemns violence against journalists, urges end to impunity

27 May - Deeply concerned by the frequency of acts of violence in many parts of the world against media professionals in armed conflict, the United Nations Security Council today adopted a resolution condemning all violations and abuses committed against journalists and strongly deploring impunity for such acts.

The unanimously adopted resolution, which affirmed that the work of a free, independent and impartial media constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society, “and thereby can contribute to the protection of civilians,” urged States to take appropriate steps to ensure accountability for crimes committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in situations of armed conflict and to ensure accountability for crimes committed against journalists.

Council members also recalled their demand that all parties to an armed conflict comply fully with the obligations applicable to them under international law related to the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including journalists, urging the immediate and unconditional release of journalists who have been kidnapped or taken as hostages, in situations of armed conflict and urging respect by all parties to conflicts for the professional independence and rights of journalists.

The high-level meeting, which was chaired by Linas Antanas Linkevičius, Foreign Minister of Lithuania, which holds the Council’s presidency for the month, also heard from the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson, who pointed to the “troubling” rise in the number of journalists killed since 2006 and the increasing targeting and threatening of journalists by criminal and terrorist groups.

“Recent killings of journalists have been given extensive and welcome attention around the world, including the brutal murders of Western media representatives in Syria,” said Mr. Eliasson. “Yet, we must not forget that around 95 per cent of
the killings of journalists in armed conflict concern locally-based journalists, receiving less media coverage.”

The Deputy Secretary-General drew the link between countries in armed conflicts, where the rule of law had broken down, and poor performance on Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index.

“We know that armed conflict not only endangers the life and safety of journalists,” he said. “It also limits the free flow of information, eroding rule of law and democracy. We should recall that conflict can easily be exacerbated in an environment that stifles freedom of expression.”

Underlining the fact that it is in such situations that the independent voices of journalist are most needed, Mr. Eliasson described ways in which members could advance the agenda of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalist and the Issue of Impunity.

He said States should unequivocally and consistently condemn the killing of journalists in conflict situations, regularly hold debates on protecting journalists, encourage Security Council-authorized missions to also look into the safety of journalists and media workers as part of protection of civilians mandates and to ensure that freedom of expression and the safety of journalists remain integral to human rights and justice reforms, and endorse and support the Plan of Action.

Also speaking to Council members was Christophe Deloire from Reporters Without Borders, who called for creation of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the protection of journalists in order to increase the prominence of the issue within the UN system. He said 90 per cent of crimes against journalists go unpunished.

“Such a high impunity rate encourages those who want to silence journalists by drowning them in their own blood,” he said.

In an impassioned address, Mariane Pearl, the widow of Daniel Pearl, a reporter for The Wall Street Journal who was kidnapped and killed in Pakistan in 2002, said this is “a troubled time” for journalism, noting the extent of killings of journalists, with 25 killed around the world in just the first five months of 2015.

“In 2014, impunity in journalism murder cases reached a staggering 96 per cent and the remaining four per cent obtained only partial justice,” she said. “Mass surveillance by some Security Council member States puts journalists and their sources at risk, undermining the trust and confidentiality vital to quality journalism. And an increasing number of countries are now using anti-terrorism laws to muzzle the press even further.”

Ms. Pearl welcomed what she called “rhetorical commitments” by States to tackle the safety of journalists and impunity, including the UN Plan of Action.

“But we need to see more concerted efforts on the ground to actually implement them,” she said.

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which is mandated to defend freedom of expression and press freedom maintains a webpage dedicated to journalists who were killed in the exercise of their profession. It remembers their contribution to freedom of expression, democracy and peace.
Ban tells European Parliament to work together to address challenge of migration

27 May - In Brussels today, where he was addressing the European Parliament, the United Nations Secretary-General today the important role played by the European Union in boosting the UN agenda, particularly on matters of peace, development and human rights.

Within that context, he stressed the importance of addressing the challenge of migration, in the Mediterranean and in Southeast Asia, in his speech to the parliament.

“Too many women, men and children are losing their lives in perilous journeys of escape,” he said. “Half those crossing the Mediterranean are fleeing war or persecution or human rights abuses. They qualify for international protection as refugees.”

Around 1,800 had drowned in the Mediterranean this year already, he said, which was a 20-fold increase on 2014, and he stressed the important role of Europe and the important collective responsibility it has to act.

“Saving lives should be the top priority,” he said. “And while we need to see more effective law enforcement actions against traffickers and smugglers, we also need safer alternatives to dangerous voyages, as well as legal channels such as resettlement, family reunification and work and study visas.”

He described meeting in Ireland several people from Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo who had been successfully re-settled, and he said that more such examples of offering a “helping hand” are needed.

He welcomed the European Commission’s new migration policy and the proposal for the relocation of 40,000 of asylum-seekers, as “a step in the right direction,” and he said that the UN, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) would continue to work with European leaders to address the crisis in a way that upholds human rights and international law.

He said the root causes of migration need to be addressed, as does the stigma and discrimination suffered by migrants in countries of destination.

“Europe is experiencing low population growth and demographic transition to an aging population,” he said. “The equation is clear: to meet its workforce deficit and maintain its economic dynamism, Europe needs migrants.”

He also discussed the need to address collectively the threat posed by violent extremism and the challenge of sustainable development, and promised his commitment to working with European institutions on addressing them.

The latter issue had also been on the agenda when Mr. Ban met with Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission. He commended the collective decision by EU Member States to achieve the 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) target for official development assistance (ODA), according to a statement by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson.

The statement noted that the EU’s decision comes at a pivotal time ahead of the Financing for Development Conference to be held in July in Addis Ababa and the post-2015 development agenda summit in September in New York.

Mr. Ban praised Europe’s effort on the Iran nuclear negotiations and within the Quartet on the Middle East and the two also discussed issues related to prospects for peace in Ukraine, Yemen and Burundi.

Also today, the Secretary-General attended the site of the Tomorrowland music festival, where he carved a message of peace on behalf of the UN on the One World Bridge, a 600 metre-long structure designed by Belgian artist, Arne Quinze.
symbolizing ‘freedom’. Mr. Ban said he hoped the bridge and his message would remind people of the UN’s work.

Last night, Mr. Ban met with Ministers of Development of European Union Member States in Brussels for a working dinner to discuss progress and challenges ahead of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July and the Summit on Sustainable Development in New York in September.

As well as general agreement that the conference’s outcome had to meet the level of ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Secretary-General applauded the EU’s leadership on climate change, stressing the importance of reaching a meaningful, universal agreement in Paris in December.

UN health agency devotes World No Tobacco Day 2015 to combating illegal tobacco trade

27 May - One in every 10 cigarettes consumed is illicit, making them cheaper and more accessible to people from low-income groups, as well as to children, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned ahead of this year’s World No Tobacco Day, devoted to combating the illegal tobacco trade.

“The tobacco epidemic is one of the world’s biggest-ever public health threats, killing nearly six million people annually,” WHO said in a factsheet on tobacco released today. “Unless urgent action is taken, the annual death toll could rise to more than eight million by 2030.”

And nearly 80 per cent of the world's one billion smokers live in low- and middle-income countries, where the burden of tobacco-related illness and death is heaviest, according to WHO.

WHO went further to warn that tobacco, which caused 100 million deaths in the 20th century, may cause one billion deaths in the 21st century if current trends continue.

Each year, World No Tobacco Day is marked on 31 May by WHO and its partners to highlight the health risks associated with tobacco use and advocate for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption.

Because the illicit trade of tobacco products poses major health, economic and security concerns worldwide, WHO has said combatting the illegal tobacco trade is the theme of this year’s Day, which falls on Sunday.

“Illicit trade makes tobacco products more affordable and accessible to people from low income groups, as well as children,” according to the WHO report Illegal trade of tobacco products: what you should know to stop it.

“Illicit tobacco products are typically sold at lower prices, thereby increasing consumption. Tax and price policies are widely recognized as among the most effective means of reducing demand for, and consumption of, tobacco products,” it said. “But the illicit trade undermines tax policies, facilitates the uptake of tobacco use by youth and increases health inequalities within the society.”

A key objective of this year’s campaign to advocate for the ratification and implementation by governments of the Protocol to Eliminate the Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, which is a supplementary treaty to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control entered into force in February 2005. Since then, it has become one of the most widely embraced treaties in the history of the United Nations with 180 Parties covering 90 per cent of the world's population.
Condemning use of sexual violence, UN envoy warns Boko Haram aims to destroy family structures

27 May - The United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has condemned Boko Haram militias in Nigeria for “waging war on women’s physical, sexual and reproductive autonomy and rights” by repeatedly raping their female captors and treating them as vessels for producing children for fighters.

“In this context, sexual violence is not merely incidental, but integral, to their strategy of domination and self-perpetuation,” Zainab Hawa Bangura said in a statement.

“In the stories of those recently released from Boko Haram captivity, I hear poignant echoes of the words of the women and girls I met last month in the Middle East, who had been freed from sexual slavery by ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant),” she said. “In both cases, they describe being treated as chattels to be ‘owned’ and traded, and as vessels for producing children for fighters.”

Her statement was issued a little over a year after the extremist group Boko Haram abducted 276 teenage girls in Chibok, Borno State, in Nigeria. Many of them remain in captivity, along with hundreds of others who have been abducted both before and since.

“I am appalled by reports that hundreds of the recently released female captives were repeatedly raped by Boko Haram militias and compelled to ‘marry’ their captors, pursuant to a campaign of forced imprisonment and forced impregnation,” she said.

“These latest revelations suggest that Boko Haram is not only destroying existing family and community structures, but is bent on controlling their future composition,” she underscored. “In order to give rise to a new generation raised in their own image, they are waging war on women’s physical, sexual and reproductive autonomy and rights.”

Saying “these are not isolated atrocities,” Ms. Bangura said, they are part of a wider pattern of women and girls being deliberately targeted by interlinked extremist groups, who share an ideological opposition to the education, rights and freedoms of women.

She reiterated her calls for all abducted women and girls to be immediately released from captivity and returned safely to their families.

Ms. Bangura also called on the Nigerian Government, with support from the international community and local organizations, to provide medical and psychosocial care, including antenatal care to those who have become pregnant, and treatment for those infected with sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS.

She also urged the international community to adopt a coordinated response that addresses the root causes of violent extremism.

“Supporting the survivors to raise and educate their children in an environment of tolerance, respect and dignity is our best hope of preventing extremists from shattering social cohesion and dictating the future,” she declared.
Some 8.6 million people in urgent need of medical help in Yemen, says UN agency

27 May - The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) today warned that the “unnecessary loss of innocent lives cannot go on” and spotlighted the increasingly dire medical situation in Yemen, where it says the health and lives of millions of people are at risk, and health facilities, staff and patients are under attack in widespread violations of international humanitarian law.

“Almost 8.6 million people are in urgent need of medical help,” WHO’s Director-General, Dr. Margaret Chan, said in a statement.

“WHO was able to dispatch almost 48 tonnes of medicine into the country during the five-day ceasefire earlier this month, serving some 400,000 people,” Dr. Chan said. “This is vastly insufficient – and people continue to suffer not only from war-related injuries, but from inability to get basic treatment for the most common health conditions, or get obstetric care during childbirth.”

She noted that as Yemen enters its 10th week of conflict, “it is innocent civilians that pay the highest price” and reported that nearly 2,000 people have been killed and 8,000 injured so far.

“Six-year-old Malak lost her mother and saw others around her die as her family fled the fighting and 65-year-old Fathiya lost 13 members of her family and is now the sole guardian of three grandchildren who survived,” said Dr. Chan.

More and more lives are lost every day, she stated, “not just due to the violence, but as a health system that has been seriously damaged barely copes with the extraordinary needs posed by the unrelenting violent conflict and can no longer provide them with the health services they need to stay alive.”

“The health and lives of millions of people are at risk,” she warned.

Hospitals are closing down their emergency operations rooms and intensive care units due to shortages in staff and fuel for generators; medicines for diabetes, hypertension and cancer are no longer available; the national tuberculosis programme has shut down in some areas; and infectious diseases such as malaria and dengue fever are spreading, according to WHO.

“Throughout the conflict, there have been widespread violations of international humanitarian law and Geneva conventions for the protection of health facilities, staff and patients,” she said.

Dr. Chan went on to say that “health infrastructure continues to be hit, with attacks reported on hospitals and ambulances, a medical warehouse, an oxygen factory, and a blood transfusion centre. Some health care workers were killed trying to save lives and more injured.”

“This unnecessary loss of innocent lives cannot go on,” she warned. “The health system must be allowed to function unimpeded by the insecurity. All parties must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians, health facilities and health staff during conflict and to permit the supply of vital humanitarian aid, such as medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to areas where it is needed most, and ensure the right to urgently-needed lifesaving health care.”
Joint UN report says rate of world hunger dropping amid wider eradication efforts

27 May - The number of the world’s chronically undernourished has dropped below the 800 million mark as an increasing number of countries hit their Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets on hunger, according to a new United Nations report released today by the Organization’s three food agencies.

The *State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015* (SOFI) report, which was jointly published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), reveals that the number of hungry declined to 795 million – 216 million fewer than in the 1990 – 1992 biennium and nearly 100 million fewer than in 2012. This, the agencies said in a press release, is due in large part to successes in the world’s developing regions.

“The near-achievement of the MDG hunger targets shows us that we can indeed eliminate the scourge of hunger in our lifetime,” said FAO Director General José Graziano da Silva.

“We must be the Zero Hunger generation. That goal should be mainstreamed into all policy interventions and at the heart of the new sustainable development agenda to be established this year,” he added.

A majority – 72 out of 129 – of the countries monitored by FAO have achieved the Millennium Development Goal target of halving the prevalence of undernourishment by 2015, with developing regions as a whole missing the target by a small margin.

In addition, 29 countries have met the more ambitious goal laid out at the World Food Summit in 1996, when governments committed to halving the absolute number of undernourished people by 2015.

IFAD President Kanayo F. Nwanze conceded that in order to create a world free from poverty and hunger, the international community would need to make it “a priority to invest in the rural areas of developing countries where most of the world’s poorest and hungriest people live.”

“We must work to create a transformation in our rural communities so they provide decent jobs, decent conditions and decent opportunities,” Mr. Nwanze declared. “We must invest in rural areas so that our nations can have balanced growth and so that the three billion people who live in rural areas can fulfil their potential.”

Despite great strides in reducing global hunger, however, the UN report notes that progress towards achieving the 2015 food security targets was hampered in recent years by challenging global economic conditions as well as extreme weather events, natural disasters, political instability and civil strife.

The SOFI 2015 report points out, in fact, that over the past 30 years crises have evolved from catastrophic, short-term events to more protracted situations causing higher hunger rates in countries suffering from them.

Yet, alongside these challenges, the world population has grown by 1.9 billion since 1990, making reductions of the number of hungry people all the more striking, the report says.

To that point, large reductions in hunger were achieved in East Asia and very fast progress was posted in Latin America and the Caribbean, southeast and central Asia, as well as some parts of Africa, showing that inclusive economic growth, agricultural investments and social protection, along with political stability makes the elimination of hunger possible.

Above all, the political will to make hunger eradication a paramount development objective has fostered progress,
particularly through efforts promoting improved agricultural productivity, inclusive economic growth, and the expansion of social protection.

“Men, women and children need nutritious food every day to have any chance of a free and prosperous future,” WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin added.

“Healthy bodies and minds are fundamental to both individual and economic growth, and that growth must be inclusive for us to make hunger history.”

**Dialogues needed to tackle violence against women, ‘accountability deficit’ in Sudan – UN expert**

**27 May** - More open and constructive dialogues should be held among Sudanese stakeholders as a top priority to address ‘the silence and the denials’ of crimes against women, a United Nations human rights expert concluded after her recent mission to the country.

“The silence and the denials, whether by State authorities or many civil society participants, regarding the subject of violence as experienced by women, is a source of concern,” Rashida Manjoo, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, said in a news release which covered the events of her 12-day visit to Sudan.

Reports and interviews demonstrate that women and girls in Sudan live in deep inequality, underdevelopment, poverty, and sometimes hostile environment. Not only does this happen in public and private spheres, but it also exists in both conflict and non-conflict zones, according to Ms. Manjoo’s end-of-mission statement.

Of particular concern, she said, was female genital mutilation and early marriages.

“Traditional, cultural and social norms,” Ms. Manjoo explained, “prevent disclosure and the seeking of assistance from persons outside of the family unit.” She therefore called on the focus on reconciliation with accountability, for crimes against women and girls.

In addition to physical, psychological and economic violence, women and girl asylum seekers and refugees also suffer from sexual humiliations during trafficking. Being insecure in conflicts has rendered them vulnerable to such violence.

Apart from above manifestations, challenges remain in legal measures. “Violence also occurs as a consequence of “the discriminatory interpretation and implementation of provisions of some laws,” noted Ms. Manjoo.

Efforts have been made at policy and institutional levels, the UN rights expert said, while noting a clamping down on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with women’s rights organizations in particular.

“The issue of access to justice and of justice itself, for crimes experienced by women and girls, requires attention,” highlighted the expert, “especially through addressing the accountability deficit that seems to be the norm in Sudan for gendered crimes.”

Ms. Manjoo urged the Government of Sudan and stakeholders, especially with the international community and the UN, to find common ground in constructively engaging and addressing the tensions that exist in the people living in Sudan.

“Holding accountable State authorities who perpetrate violence is also an imperative in the current context,” stressed the Special Rapporteur, calling on the Government to establish a Commission of Inquiry which includes national and international experts to investigate allegations of mass rapes in different regions.
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.

**UN Latin America commission chief welcomes visit of China premier, looks forward to closer ties**

*27 May* - The head of the United Nations’ regional commission in Latin America and the Caribbean has met with the Premier of China, and looked forward to greater cooperation and a deeper relationship with the Asian country.

“The relationship between China and Latin America and the Caribbean has reached enough maturity to take a qualitative leap forward and advance towards strategic ties that provide mutual benefits,” said Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

“We at ECLAC have carefully followed the complex process of reforms that China is undergoing to advance towards an inclusive development model characterized by greater environmental sustainability.”

In the last 15 years, trade between ECLAC countries and China expanded by 22 times, with China now the region’s second biggest trading partner, and the largest for both Chile and Brazil. The expansion and deepening of financial and investment relations, particularly in the areas of infrastructure and energy, is likely to bring about important mutual benefits, Ms. Bárcena said.

She called for action to boost overall prosperity, noting that Chinese investment will make a greater contribution to development in the region if it is oriented not only towards the traditional sectors of hydrocarbons and mining, but to manufacturing, services and the development of better infrastructure in transportation, energy and logistics.

“There is also a great deal of room to promote a high-level dialogue and closer positions between China and the region regarding key issues on the global agenda, in particular the post-2015 Development Agenda and the future multilateral regime to combat climate change, as well as the reform of the international monetary system,” she said. “The strategic approximation of China and Latin America and the Caribbean is also part of the necessary strengthening of cooperation among countries from the south.”

In his keynote lecture, the Chinese Premier thanked ECLAC for its contributions to regional thinking and cooperation, stressing the region’s importance to global peace and stability and pointing to several cooperation documents signed in the areas of energy, mining, infrastructure construction, nuclear plants and scientific and technological innovation, valued at more than $30 billion.

“China is prepared to join forces with Latin American and Caribbean countries to contribute in a small but meaningful way to the construction of our happy home and to work together for a more beautiful world,” Mr. Li said, explaining his proposition for a new ‘3x3’ cooperation model, focused on logistics, energy and information technology by improving interaction between business, society and the Government and by broadening three financing channels.

He called for more collaboration between China and ECLAC countries, with the aim of forging a global network of associations for balanced development and of universal benefit, safeguarding in the best way possible both common interests and developing countries’ right to have their say.
Middle East Quartet representative Tony Blair is stepping down, UN and partners announce

27 May - The diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East peace process today announced that former British Prime Minister Tony Blair plans to step aside as the group’s Representative and expressed its “deep appreciation” for his “remarkable service” and commitment to advancing peace and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians.

“As the Quartet’s envoy on the ground during the last eight years, Mr. Blair demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the cause of Israeli-Palestinian peace and made lasting contributions to the effort to promote economic growth and improve daily life in the West Bank and Gaza,” read a statement issued by the Quartet.

The Quartet, represented by the United Nations, the Russian Federation, the United States, and the European Union, appointed the former British Prime Minister as its representative in 2007.

In its statement, the Quartet expressed its deep appreciation to Tony Blair and thanked him “for his remarkable service” and reaffirmed its commitment to advancing peace and prosperity for Israelis and Palestinians.