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UN ‘blue helmet’ killed near site of Lebanon-Israel cross-fire; investigation under way

28 January - Amid what Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has described as a “serious deterioration of the security situation in Southern Lebanon,” the United Nations Interim Force there (UNIFIL) has launched an investigation into the death of a peacekeeper today near the border with Israel, according to a statement released by the Mission.

The precise cause of the peacekeeper’s death remains undetermined. However, the UN has noted that Hizbollah has claimed responsibility for a subsequent rocket attack on an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) patrol that killed two Israeli soldiers and injured others.

“At around 11:30 am this morning, UNIFIL observed six rockets launched towards Israel from the vicinity of Wazzani north of Maysat in the UNIFIL area of operations,” the peacekeeping operation said in a statement. “The IDF returned artillery fire in the same general area.”

“During the course of the developments, a UNIFIL peacekeeper deployed at a UN position near Ghajar sustained serious injuries that resulted in his death,” according to UNIFIL. “The precise cause of death is as yet undetermined and remains the subject of investigation.”

In a statement issued by his spokesperson in New York, the Secretary-General deeply regretted the death of the UNIFIL peacekeeper and condemned all violence. He called for maximum calm and restraint, the preservation of stability of the area and said all parties should act responsibly to prevent any escalation in an already tense regional environment.
That statement also said that a rocket attack on an IDF patrol killed two IDF soldiers and injured others; the attack was claimed by Hizbollah. The Israel Defense Forces retaliated.

“The Secretary-General is also concerned about violations of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement between Israel and Syria,” the statement said. “Rockets were fired yesterday, 27 January 2015, from the area of limitation on the Bravo side across the ceasefire line and the Israel Defense Forces responded with artillery fire and later an airstrike.”

The UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Sigrid Kaag, echoed the Secretary-General’s deep concern over the serious deterioration of the security situation in South Lebanon following the exchange of fire. She urgently called on all parties to refrain from any actions that could destabilize the situation further.

Ms. Kaag strongly urged all parties to continue to abide by their obligations under Security Council resolution 1701, which called for the full cessation of hostilities in the month-long 2006 war between Israel and Hizbollah in Lebanon.

UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander Major-General Luciano Portolano was in immediate contact with the parties to help control the situation and prevent further escalation, it said.

The Force Commander has strongly condemned this serious violation of UN Security Council resolution 1701. He is maintaining continuous contacts with the parties and has urged both sides to exercise utmost restraint.

UNIFIL has launched an investigation to determine the facts and circumstances of the incident.

UNIFIL also reported that at around 1:30 p.m. today, five rockets were fired from the general area of Kafer Shouba towards Israel, and the IDF fired artillery rounds towards the source of fire. UNIFIL said it has been informed by the IDF that they incurred casualties as a result of fire from the Lebanese side.

The 10,000-strong UN peacekeeping operation in Lebanon has further reinforced its presence on the ground and intensified patrols across the area of operations in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces.

**Remembering Holocaust victims, Ban urges unity to eradicate anti-Semitism, all forms of hatred**

28 January - Remembering Holocaust victims, Ban urges unity to eradicate anti-Semitism, all forms of hatred, bigotry

The international community has not yet found the antidote to the poison that led to genocide 70 years ago, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon lamented today, marking the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust by calling strongly for the world to work together to stamp out all forms of bigotry, hatred and extremism.

“As we remember what was lost in the past, and as we recognize the perils of the present, we know what we must do – and we know we must do it together,” said Mr. Ban in opening remarks to the UN General Assembly's annual commemoration of the Day.

Joining the Secretary-General at the event this afternoon were, among other speakers, Reuven Rivlin, President of Israel, and Denis Antoine, Vice-President of the General Assembly, as well as Holocaust survivors and World War II veterans.

The International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust is marked every year on 27 January, the date on which Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated in 1945. This year's observance, on the theme 'Liberty, Life and the Legacy of the Holocaust Survivors', coincides with two milestone events: the 70th anniversary of the Second World War's end and the founding of the UN.
Recalling his visit to the Auschwitz Birkenau camp in November 2013, Mr. Ban said: “I saw the full machinery of murder: the railway platform where the infamous selections were made; the barracks that held Jews, Roma, Sinti, non-Jewish Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, dissidents, disabled persons and homosexuals; and finally the ovens where human beings were turned to ashes.”

“I was especially moved by the displays of photographs and films of European Jewish life before tyranny took hold – family meals, weddings and other rituals, performances by the singers and actors who enlivened the cities in which they lived. We can still feel the pain of all that was lost and destroyed in a frenzy of cruelty,” the Secretary-General added.

The images of emaciated camp survivors and piles of dead bodies were prominent in the minds of those who gathered to establish the United Nations, Mr. Ban continued. A determination to uphold human dignity was written into the Organization’s founding Charter 70 years ago – and has defined the UN’s work ever since. But there is still a long way to go. The struggle for justice and tolerance faces widespread challenges.

“Anti-Semitism remains a violent reality; Jews continue to be killed solely because they are Jews. Extremism and dehumanization are present across the world, exploited through social media and abetted by sensationalist press coverage. The targets are as diverse as humankind itself,” the Secretary-General said.

In Europe and elsewhere, Muslims are under attack, the victims of bigotry at the hands of political opportunists and ultranationalists. Vulnerable populations everywhere bury their dead and live in fear of further violence.

“I take heart from counter-demonstrations, rallies and interfaith dialogue. We must all remain on our guard. We must uphold human rights, democratic freedoms and our responsibility to protect people at risk. And we must respond to terrorism and provocation in ways that resolve – instead of multiply – the problem,” he underscored.

In his address, Reuven Rivlin, President of Israel, recalled the “brutal”, “perverted” extermination of Jews during the Holocaust “in the most horrifying crime ever committed in the history of the human race.” The United Nations rose on the ruins of the Second World War, he said, stressing that the International Day was not just a gesture because the pledge ‘Never again’ was “the very essence of the UN,” and the principle and primary reason for its existence.

However, since the UN was founded, more nations and communities had been slaughtered. “We must ask ourselves honestly: is our struggle – the struggle of the General Assembly against genocide – effective enough?” he said. “Are we shedding too many tears and taking too little action?”

Mr. Rivlin noted that the Convention on Genocide was now 64 years-old but remained a merely “symbolic document” that had not realized its objectives. The international community had a duty to lay down the red lines defining genocide and to make clear that crossing those lines must mean intervention. Humanitarian and moral considerations had to take precedence over economic, political or other interests in the fight against genocide.

“Nations cannot be saved and must not be saved as an afterthought or from considerations of cost-benefit,” Mr. Rivlin said. “Unless the moral fire burns within us, the lessons of the Holocaust will never be learned.”

The General Assembly must act as a determined and unified international community or else risk leaving the ‘Never again’ oath hollow and defiled.

“We must remain silent no longer. We must rise up and take action,” he said.

Also in opening remarks, General Assembly Vice-President Denis Antoine also underscored the importance of drawing lessons from the tragedy of the Holocaust and the need to “pass them on to the present and future generations,” particularly as the world continued to confront instances of violent intolerance and brutal prejudice.

“We have a duty to ensure that such a tragedy as the Holocaust never happens again,” he declared in an address on behalf of General Assembly president Sam Kutesa. “Yet, as recent events have shown us, we must remain ever vigilant. In many corners of the world, mistrust, intolerance and racism are fuelling violence and hatred and tearing communities apart.”
As a result, he announced that the Assembly will convene an upcoming High-level thematic debate on Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation in order to provide Member States and other stakeholders an opportunity to discuss “how enhance dialogue and understanding and counter the threat of extremism and radicalization.”

“As we honour today the life and legacy of the victims of the Holocaust, may the lessons of the past; the dangers of indifference, the roots and ramifications of prejudice and the importance of individual and collective responsibility guide our steps, to prevent such acts of intolerance and hate from ever happening again,” the Assembly Vice-President concluded.

Also as part of today’s ceremony, which was rescheduled from yesterday as UN Headquarters was closed due to inclement weather, Grammy-award winning violinist Miri Ben-Ari and Cantor Shimmy Miller, Congregation Ahavath Torah, recited the memorial prayers accompanied by keyboardist Daniel Gildar.

Today’s ceremony was followed by the opening of the exhibit “Shoah: How was it humanly possible,” curated by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority, at 2:30 p.m. in the visitors lobby of UN Headquarters.

**UN Assembly hears Holocaust survivor’s plea to never forget ‘all human life is sacred’**

28 January - As part of the annual events at the United Nations to mark the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, the General Assembly today heard a Holocaust survivor and a former World War II veteran recount the horrors they had witnessed some 70 years ago as they urged the world “not to forget that all human life is sacred.”

At a meeting that was opened by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and which featured statements from, among others, Reuven Rivlin, President of Israel and Denis Antoine, Holocaust survivor Jona Laks, who travelled to New York from Tel Aviv, recalled that in Auschwitz she had been “just number A27725,” a tattoo that is still emblazoned on her arm.

“Seventy years since the liberation, I stand before you to bear witness of a world that once and a people disseminated because they were born Jewish. I stand before you to bear witness what befell my family, my twin sister and me,” Ms. Laks said.

The International is marked every year on 27 January, the date on which Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated in 1945. This year's observance, on the theme 'Liberty, Life and the Legacy of the Holocaust Survivors,' coincides with two milestone events: the 70th anniversary of the Second World War's end and the founding of the UN.

Ms. Laks said she was six years old when “Hitler invaded Poland,” and recalled how all Jews were demanded to abandon their homes and move into the ghettos. The confiscation of Jews’ property and being forced wear the yellow Star of David was a long and painful journey of dehumanization. “We went through horrors, starvation and illnesses,” she remembered. The concentration of a large number of people in a small overcrowded area caused epidemics and various diseases. All these things took their toll and make the children in the camps weak.

“One night, my father, who lived some distance from the children’s concentration camps, learned some of the less productive children were going to be deported to even worse camps. He managed to sneak in and bring my twin sister Miriam and me out. This is how my life was saved, because the next day, the 20,000 children were taken to be exterminated.”

Shortly thereafter, Ms. Laks was sent to Auschwitz with her sisters. “I remember very clearly the day we arrived in Auschwitz; we were lined up for selection. As we lined up, Hannah, our eldest sister who was afraid I would not pass this selection, gave me her wooden shoes to make me look taller, pinched my cheeks to make me look healthier, and pushed me to the back of the line.”
“But despite her efforts, I was marked for the crematorium while my twin sister was sent the other way. I was standing in line getting closer and closer to the crematorium. I could see smoke coming out and even smell the bodies,” Ms. Laks remembered.

But she was spared when one of the doctors noticed that she was a twin.

“I wish I could spare you all the gory details of what came next. There is nothing darker about the Holocaust than the role played by medical doctors,” she said. “It has been proven beyond any doubt that experiments performed on twins were not only cruel but scientifically useless. We were treated as inhuman creatures, lab animals and nothing more.”

After the war, in 1948, “an orphan and completely alone,” Ms. Laks made her way to then-British controlled Palestine. She said that when the State of Israel was established later that year, for the first time in her life she felt like she was a person and “no longer just a number.”

“Not only people died in Auschwitz, the idea of humanity perished as well. The message is not to forget and that human life is sacred,” she said.

Addressing the General Assembly via video-link, Avner Shalev, Chairman of Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust memorial, delivering today’s keynote address, asked why the Shoah refuses to become history and remains relevant to so many people. Genocides and other human atrocities occurred before the Holocaust but this event in history stands out. The Holocaust is so powerful, he said, because of the ease and speed with which the perpetrators’ ideology succeeded.

How could hundreds of years of human progress yield such massive atrocities? Modern society deludes itself that technological advances go hand-in-hand with moral progress. “This is not true. The Shoah was conceived by highly educated people,” Mr. Shalev said, emphasizing that if it happened before, it can happen again.

“How can we assure that values will still be essential to our lives as technology advances?” Through education, he answered. Yad Vashem teaches educators that in addition to being an immense atrocity to humanity, the Holocaust was also a dramatic struggle of the human spirit. “Our road today is plagued with cruel conflicts and we can and must educate the next generation of leaders to behave ethically. I call upon my fellow educators to strive and persevere in the battle of human morality.”

When the war ended, Mr. Shalev recalled, much of the world rejoiced for the Allied victory, but Jews who survived were left to mourn the death of their families and friends. They chose hope instead. And it is evident now that in the last 70 years they demonstrated their commitment to humanity by rebuilding their families and communities.

Taking to the podium next, Boris Feltman, a 95-year-old World War II veteran, who recalled his time serving in Ukraine. He remembered the ghetto of thousands of Jews who were transferred from Romania; the young people forming resistance groups; and his own struggles witnessing the brutality around him.

He remembered how fascists caught 12 young Jewish men and killed them by throwing them 15 metres off a bridge. “They did not let anyone bury those men for two days.” Mr. Feltman recalled how fascists would shoot people “all the time without reason.”

Millions of people and six million Jews perished and “we, soldiers of the Soviet Union, with United States, England and Canada, on 9 May, 1945, felt like we rid the world of evil forever. We were happy like kids.”

“Generation after generation has the responsibility to tell the truth about the Holocaust,” the World War II veteran stressed, warning that today, new evils have emerged: anti-Semites, terrorists, and extremists again want to destroy society.

Also as part of today’s ceremony, which was rescheduled from yesterday as UN Headquarters was closed due to inclement weather, Grammy-award winning violinist Miri Ben-Ari and Cantor Shimmy Miller, Congregation Ahavath Torah, recited the memorial prayers accompanied by keyboardist Daniel Gildar.
Today’s ceremony was followed by the opening of the exhibit “Shoah: How was it humanly possible,” curated by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority, at 2:30 p.m. in the visitors lobby of UN Headquarters.

**Lack of funding hampering humanitarian aid to war-affected Syrians – UN relief official**

28 January - More funding is urgently required for humanitarian organizations to help people in desperate need in Syria, the United Nations Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator told the Security Council today during a briefing on the situation in the country.

“Needs continue to outpace response,” said Kyung-wha Kang, as she delivered the briefing on behalf of Valerie Amos, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. “The relentless violence and destruction in Syria has led to one of the worst displacements of people the world has seen in decades.”

Ms. Kang said the Syria response is now contained in a single plan and appeal, inclusive of assistance both from within the country and through cross-border operations, adding that the response to people inside Syria will require $2.9 billion this year to assist the 7.6 million people displaced within the country, and the 3.8 million refugees.

“Last year, we received 48 per cent of the amount requested,” she said. “Lack of funding, for example, for the winterization programme, means that hundreds of thousands among the 3.3 million people targeted for assistance have not received assistance, during this particularly harsh winter.”

Despite the lack of resources and the extremely difficult and unsafe operating environment inside Syria, humanitarian organizations continued to help with, among others, distributing food to over 3.6 million people, water and sanitation interventions to 1.5 million, medical assistance to over 680,000 and emergency non-food items to over 500,000.

She said UN’s cross-border deliveries from Turkey and Jordan into Syria totalled 59 under Security Council resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), providing food assistance to over 702,000 people, non-food items for over 615,000, water and sanitation supplies for 311,000, and medical supplies for over 468,000 people. The World Food Programme (WFP) had reached 315,000 people in rural areas and Aleppo city in December, planning to reach more next month, but needing more funds to do so.

As the conflict entered its fifth year, “extreme violence and brutality” continued to characterize it. Populated areas were attacked with explosives by both sides, with the Government still using barrel bombs in airstrikes, and implicated in reports of attacks on schools, medical facilities and medical personnel. Meanwhile “atrocities meted out by ISIL” continued, including reports of executions and “brutal subjugation” of women and girls.

“Infrastructure for essential services continues to come under deliberate and indiscriminate attack,” she added, describing Al-Nusra Front’s cutting of water supplies to the 600,000 population of Idleb city and the response by local government authorities of stopping aid deliveries to opposition-controlled areas.

“At the beginning of the conflict, nearly four years ago, 1 million people needed humanitarian assistance inside the country,” she said. “Today, that figure stands at 12.2 million. 3.8 million people have fled to neighbouring countries.”

Of the 12.2 million, she said 40 per cent resided in areas where they struggle to receive basic services and secure basic staples and where humanitarian access remains a significant challenge. UN agencies were unable to deliver food to the entire caseload of 600,000 people in ISIL-controlled Raqqa and Deir ez Zor.

In December, she said, injectable medicines and surgical supplies were denied to areas in Eastern Ghouta. In January, despite support from the Governor of Homs, Government security forces removed all surgical items, diarrhoea kits, midwifery kits and reproductive health kits from the interagency convoy to Al Wa’er, in breach of international
humanitarian law.

A total of 212,000 people remained besieged, 185,000 by Government forces, and though 9,000 were able to evacuate towns in Eastern Ghouta, aid deliveries remain heavily restricted. At the same time, no assistance had reached Yarmouk camp for Palestinians since 6 December due to fighting in and around the camp, while there had been no progress on addressing the administrative constraints placed on international non-governmental organizations by the Government of Syria.

“The Security Council must find a way to end the conflict in Syria,” Ms. Kang urged. “We must not allow the world to forget Syria and the atrocities being committed against its people.”

Mali: UN Mission to investigate deadly protests against compound

28 January - The United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has launched an investigation into the events surrounding a violent protest in the northern city of Gao yesterday during which several people were reportedly killed and a number of others injured.

In an interview with UN Radio, MINUSMA spokesperson, Olivier Salgado, confirmed that a protest took place in the north-eastern Malian city on 27 January with demonstrators reacting to the establishment of a temporary security zone in Tabankort, a town due north of Gao and in a restive area of the country.

Mr. Salgado noted that crowd had surrounded the MINUSMA compound and pelted the facility with stones and Molotov cocktails, injuring two UN Police officers. As a result, he added, UN Police used tear gas and fired warning shots in order to disperse the crowd and prevent it from entering the compound.

The local press have reported four dead, three of them by gunshot, and eight others wounded among the protestors, although Mr. Salgado could issue a confirmation.

“A full investigation by MINUSMA is ongoing to determine facts, to confirm casualties, and clarify how and by whom they have been harmed,” the MINUSMA Spokesperson continued.

Meanwhile, at a press briefing in New York, UN spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, said MINUSMA had called on all concerned to stay calm and refrain from any action that could distract from this investigation or divert further MINUSMA from its focus, which is to bring the parties to respect the ceasefire and resume political talks in Algiers.

In addition, Mr. Dujarric said the Mission urged all stakeholders involved in the Mali peace process to behave responsibly and to call on their supporters to refrain from more violence.

FEATURE: Children’s struggles for education focus of award-winning film screened at UN

28 January - An encounter with three Kenyan children running to school through the savannah on a scorching hot, blindingly sunny early morning was the improbable inspiration for a documentary film that was screened at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Pascal Plisson, the Director of On the Way to School, a film about the arduous daily journeys taken by children in four different countries around the world, says he was struck by the perseverance and determination to study shown by the young Maasai boys as they bounded through grassland every day on a long and perilous journeys in pursuit of
knowledge.

“I’ve been travelling around the world for a long time, seeing kids struggling to get to school in a lot of countries,” Mr. Plisson said in an interview with UN News Centre last Friday. “It was very important to do this movie because I could show very simply how kids are struggling to go to school and the motivation they have.”

The film was made with support of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the non-governmental organization, Aide et Action, both of which helped the filmmakers to gather stories from around the world for the movie.

The four stories feature children who have to fight just to make it into a schoolroom each day, pushed by the understanding that education is crucial to their future. Jackson, an 11 year-old Kenyan from the Sumburu tribe, who hopes to become a pilot, risks his life daily, running to a school 15 kilometres from his home with his 6 year-old sister, dodging armed gangs and elephants.

Carlito, a shepherd’s son in Argentina, rides a horse 18 kilometres through Patagonia every morning, following his ambition to become a vet, while Zahira is the first girl in her Berber family in Morocco to attend school. Despite having to travel 22 kilometres every day, walking through mountains and hitchhiking, she is at the top of her class and hopes to become a doctor.

Samuel, who is 13 and from India, has the same career goal, and is chasing it despite being unable to walk. He lives with his mother in a hut that has no running water or electricity and is the only member of his family who can read. His brothers pull and push him more than four kilometres to school every day in a wheelchair made of recycled bric-a-brac.

Released in 2013, On the Way to School received widespread critical acclaim and broke box office records for a documentary film in France and Italy. It won a César – a French Oscar award – for best documentary in 2014, and Mr. Plisson felt it was essential that the film be screened at the United Nations.

“If there was one place where we could show this movie, it’s the United Nations,” he said. “[The UN is] really involved in education programmes, so if [the film] can help, if it can open eyes a little bit about education, then for me that’s nice.”

After the film was screened to an audience including UN staff, journalists and a class of schoolchildren, Mr. Plisson was joined at the podium by Maher Nasser, the acting Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, to discuss the film. Mr. Nasser welcomed the light it shed on the travails faced by so many children around the world in their efforts to attend school.

“We sometimes take basic access to education for granted,” he said. “But after seeing the perseverance of these children, I am sure that we will all better appreciate the opportunities that most of us – and our children – enjoy.”

Education is a fundamental human right that is essential for the exercise of all other human rights, and the UN and UNESCO have laid down a number of internationally binding obligations to ensure children are granted their right without discrimination or exclusion.

The proposed sustainable development goals (SDGs) include a standalone goal devoted to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all, as well as several targets relating to gender balance, vocational training and secondary education.

Mr. Plisson said he has been impressed with the impact his film has had on policy-makers, particularly in countries featured in the film.

“When we show this movie in Kenya, for example – to Ministers – they realize that they have a lot of work to do for a kid like Jackson to access school, not to have to run and risk his life every morning and every night,” he says. “So they will build boarding schools.”

The film is due for release in the United States on 6 February at the Quad cinemas in New York, and Mr. Plisson expects the
run to expand the impact of the film. He also told the audience at the UN that a television series, spun-off from the many incredible stories that they researched over the course of making the film, will be released in France, featuring 10 other stories of the lengths children go to in order to ensure their education.

The event at UN Headquarters was organized by UNESCO, the Permanent Mission of France, the French UN Staff Society of New York (AFIN) and Distrib Films US.

**Middle East envoy Serry ‘outraged’ by attack on UN Gaza compound**

28 January - The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, Robert Serry, has expressed outrage by the assault on the UN premises in Gaza this morning.

“During a pre-announced demonstration, of which Hamas was well aware, a number of protestors climbed the perimeter wall and entered the compound causing damage to United Nations premises and property,” Mr. Serry said today in a statement from his office, UNSCO.

Due to precautionary measures taken, United Nations personnel working in the compound were fortunately unharmed.

The Special Coordinator noted with “deep concern” that, despite repeated assurances, the security forces in Gaza did not take the necessary and timely measures to protect UNSCO’s compound.

“Pending a full transfer of security responsibilities to the legitimate Palestinian Authority, we continue to hold Hamas fully responsible for the security and safety of all United Nations personnel and operations in Gaza,” Mr. Serry said.

As this serious incident took place in the context of increasing incitement against the United Nations in Gaza, the Special Coordinator is conducting an urgent review of operations in Gaza.

Mr. Serry reiterated that the situation in Gaza has become “extremely volatile again” and will continue to deteriorate unless a number of critical underlying issues are addressed with both determination and a heightened sense of urgency.

“We also continue to urge donors to support humanitarian operations and fulfill the commitments they have made in Cairo for the reconstruction of Gaza,” the Special Coordinator emphasized.

**World tourism tops 1.1 billion in 2014, contributing to global economic recovery – UN**

27 January - The number of international tourists reached 1.13 billion in 2014, 51 million more than in 2013, on trend for the fifth consecutive year of above average growth since the 2009 economic crisis, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) announced today.

“Over the past years, tourism has proven to be a surprisingly strong and resilient economic activity and a fundamental contributor to the economic recovery by generating billions of dollars in exports and creating millions of jobs, said UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai at the opening of the Spain Global Tourism Forum in Madrid.

He added: “This has been true for destinations all around the world, but particularly for Europe, as the region struggles to consolidate its way out of one of the worst economic periods in its history.”

According to the latest UNWTO figures, the Americas (+7 per cent) and Asia and the Pacific (+5 per cent) regions
registered the strongest growth, while Europe (+4 per cent), the Middle East (+4 per cent) and Africa (+2 per cent) grew at a slightly more modest pace.

By subregion, North America (+8 per cent) saw the best results, followed by North-East Asia, South Asia, Southern and Mediterranean Europe, Northern Europe and the Caribbean, all increasing by 7 per cent.

The outlook remains positive for 2015, as confirmed by the UNWTO Confidence Index. According to the 300 experts consulted worldwide, tourism performance is expected to improve this year, though expectations are less upbeat than a year ago. UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to grow up to 4 per cent this year. And by region, growth is expected to be stronger in Asia and the Pacific and the Americas, followed by Europe. Arrivals are also expected to increase in Africa and the Middle East.

“We expect demand to continue growing in 2015 as the global economic situation improves, even though there are still plenty of challenges ahead. On the positive side, oil prices have declined to a level not seen since 2009. This will lower transport costs and boost economic growth by lifting purchasing power and private demand in oil importing economies. Yet, it could also negatively impact some of the oil exporting countries which have emerged as strong tourism source markets,” added Mr Rifai.

**Security Council strongly condemns terrorist attack on hotel in Libyan capital**

*27 January* - The United Nations Security Council today condemned in the strongest terms the deadly terrorist attack against the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli, Libya, and underlined the need to bring the perpetrators, financiers and sponsors of such “reprehensible” acts to justice.

In a statement issued to the press in New York, members of the Security Council strongly condemned the incident and expressed deep sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims of this heinous act, and wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

Press reports suggest that at least three people were killed and half a dozen or more were injured today in a car bomb explosion and gun attack against the Corinthia Hotel, which is located in the heart of Libya's capital, Tripoli.

The deadly attack comes as the second round of political talks among Libyan parties wrapped up in Geneva in what the UN described as a “positive atmosphere” where, as part of the discussions, the participants “called on all Libyans to stand united against terrorism.”

For its part, the Security Council reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, and that any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivation, wherever and whenever and by whomever committed.

Further, Council members reiterated their determination to combat terrorism and urged all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with relevant regional authorities in this regard.

The Council also reaffirmed full support for Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Bernardino León, and urged all the parties in Libya to engage constructively with his efforts to resume an inclusive political process aimed at addressing the political and security challenges facing the country.

The Council’s call for constructive engagement comes as participants in the Libyan dialogue facilitated by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), which Mr. León heads, concluded two days of discussions held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.
According to a press statement from UNSMIL, the discussions were conducted in a positive atmosphere reflecting the sense of national responsibility and a sincere determination to find solutions to end the political and military conflict buffeting their country.

Participants, continued the Mission, discussed the issue of the formation of a consensual national unity government to ensure the unity of the country and State institutions. This includes the government's mandate, program, the decision-making process as well as the criteria for selecting its members.

“Participants also discussed how this government could benefit from UNSMIL support to carry out its tasks and the guarantees the international community could provide in this regard and in dealing with anyone who obstructs the political and security process,” said the statement.

In addition, UNSMIL notes that the parties to the talks were unanimous in rejecting terrorism.

“They strongly condemned the attack that targeted a hotel in Tripoli…causing a number of casualties among Libyans and foreigners, as well as other terrorist attacks against civilians across the country,” said the Mission, adding that the parties emphasized that such attacks would not derail the political process and would in fact create an incentive for all the Libyan sides to forge ahead with efforts to stabilize the country.

“The participants called on all Libyans to stand united against terrorism and send a clear message that terrorism has no place in a new Libya for which the Libyans have sacrificed so much,” said UNSMIL in its news release.

**UN South Sudan Mission condemns killing of civilians in roadside ambush**

27 January - The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has strongly condemned the killing of eleven civilians, five of them journalists, in a roadside ambush on Sunday.

A press release issued today by the Mission says that unidentified gunmen reportedly opened fire on a two-car convoy, travelling to Raja from Western Bahr El Ghazal State. The County Commissioner of Raja, James Benjamin, was travelling in the convoy, along with a team of local journalists.

The vehicle was attacked in the country's western region between Sepo and Magaya, according to UNMISS, in the second such roadside ambush to occur in the last two weeks.

The Mission calls upon local, state and national authorities to investigate the incident and bring those responsible to justice.

**Yemen: UN special envoy welcomes release of abducted presidential aide**

27 January - The United Nations envoy on Yemen has welcomed the release today of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's chief of staff, and urged the opposition group Ansarallah – which had abducted the official last week – “to undertake steps that would be in the best interest of all political sides and the people of Yemen.”

According to a note to the press issued by the spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the UN Special Adviser on Yemen, Jamal Benomar, expressed great pleasure on today's release by Ansarallah of Ahmed Awadh Bin Mubarak, Director of the Office of the President, after Mr. Benomar's continuous mediation efforts.

The UN says that the Special Adviser remarked that this news would help reduce tensions and enable progress in the on-
going negotiations that he has been facilitating. Further, Mr. Benomar urged Ansarallah to undertake steps that would be in the best interest of all political sides and the people of Yemen.

In the context of the daily meetings of all the signatories to the Peace and National Partnership Agreement that Mr. Benomar has been convening, he pressed all political parties to act responsibly and to give priority to the national interest in order to overcome the current crisis, said the UN.

Despite the formation of a new Government in November 2014 aimed at ending a period of political turbulence and bringing about a full transition towards democracy, Yemen continues to be plagued by violence and mass political demonstrations.

News of Mr. Mubarak's release after nearly 10 days being held captive comes as political tensions grip the country's capital, Sana'a. The Secretary-General and the UN Security Council have, in recent days, expressed concern about the situation and issued strong calls for calm, restraint and dialogue among the parties.

Just this past weekend, Mr. Ban voiced serious concern about developments following the resignation of the President and Prime Minister amid a takeover of the capital by Houthi militants. This followed a steady deterioration the previous week as Government forces clashed with Houthi militants throughout the capital.

As police, protesters clash in Egypt, UN rights chief urges end to excessive use of force

27 January - “Deeply disturbed” by the deaths resulting from recent clashes between security forces and protesters in Egypt, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, has urged for an end to the excessive use of force, his spokesperson said today.

According to the UN Office for the High Commissioner (OHCHR), at least 20 people had been killed in the Cairo suburb of Matariya, in Alexandria and in downtown Cairo during protests since last Friday commemorating the fourth anniversary of the 2011 popular protests that had led to the ouster of then-President Hosni Mubarak.

The death of a leading female activist, Shaimaa Al Sabagh, had been captured on video and in photographs posted on the Internet, after she had apparently been shot from behind during a peaceful protest in central Cairo, added OHCHR.

“I have in the past urged the Egyptian authorities to take urgent measures to ensure that any excessive use of force by security personnel is promptly investigated, alleged perpetrators are put on trial and victims have access to justice and compensation,” said spokesperson Rupert Colville, reading out a statement from the High Commissioner at a briefing in Geneva today.

“Hundreds of people had died during protests against successive governments since January 2011, and there has been very little in the way of accountability,” he underscored.

The High Commissioner also said that all those who had been detained for protesting peacefully had to be released.

“The long-term stability of Egypt is only possible if fundamental human rights are respected,” Mr. Colville said. “Otherwise, people's grievances will fester and feelings of injustice will grow, creating fertile ground for further social and political unrest.”

He went on to say that “it is in the interests of all sides to engage in meaningful dialogue and to make efforts to find peaceful solutions to Egypt's many problems.”

High Commissioner Zeid also condemned the murder of two policemen who had been shot at a checkpoint near the Pyramids over the weekend, and the death of a security officer during a clash between protesters and security forces on the
same day.

**As shelling batters Ukraine’s cities, country’s children increasingly in danger – UN**

*27 January -* The continued shelling of Ukraine's urban centres serves as a shocking reminder of the price being paid by the country's children and families. A UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) official said today as she warned that the intensifying violence in the Eastern European country was increasingly putting children's lives in danger.

In a press release issued earlier today, UNICEF noted that since September, thousands of people in war-torn Donetsk had been spending most of their days and nights in at least 12 bomb shelters with little or no access to water, hygiene, sanitation or food. Among them, the UN agency added, were an estimated 1,000 children who regularly sought refuge from the heavy shelling.

“The most vulnerable are those who are forced to seek refuge in unsanitary, crowded and freezing cellars and bomb shelters, children living on the streets, and those who come from poor families or whose homes have been severely damaged,” UNICEF Representative in Ukraine, Giovanna Barberis, explained.

“UNICEF reminds all parties to the conflict in Ukraine to keep children out of harm's way,” Ms. Barberis continued. “We also urge the international community to act now to provide the thousands of children affected with the basic assistance they need.”

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine transcended what was initially seen as an internal Ukrainian political crisis into violent clashes in parts of the country, later reaching full-scale conflict in the east. A cease-fire and peace plan for eastern Ukraine was signed in the Belarussian capital of Minsk on 5 September, but remains fragile. The situation has since continuously deteriorated, with serious consequences for the country's unity, territorial integrity and stability.

Ms. Barberis reiterated her concern for the safety of Ukraine's children – including the 1.7 million affected by the conflict – in a separate phone conversation with UNICEF spokesperson, Christophe Boulierac, during a press conference in Geneva. She noted that the recent shelling in Mariupol, which claimed the lives of two children and injured another seven, had further underlined the urgent need for an end to the violence and the provision of a scaled up humanitarian response.

In addition, she said, Ukraine's children were increasingly vulnerable to psychological damage as well as infection from various diseases due to the lack of hygiene and vaccines. Answering a question from a reporter, she admitted that barely 50 per cent of the 7.9 million Ukrainian children had been properly vaccinated against polio, rendering them susceptible to contagion.

Also speaking from Geneva, Rupert Colville, a spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), revealed the latest casualty figures gleaned from UN data. As of 26 January, he said, a total of at least 5,187 people had been killed in the continuing conflict and 11,550 had been wounded.
UN agency sounds warning over Iraqis displaced to country's South

27 January - The United Nations has said today that many recently displaced Iraqis in the south of the strife-riven country are facing a “critical” humanitarian situation.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) recently conducted an assessment of Iraqis fleeing the country's current crisis to southern governorates of Najaf, Kerbala and Babel, where the organization assists about 50,000 people.

“Despite the dangers and challenges posed in accessing this area, WFP has been present in southern and central Iraq since the start of the country's crisis in 2014,” said Jane Pearce, Representative and Country Director of the WFP Office in Iraq.

Many were unable to find refuge in the crowded northern Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which hosts close to 50 per cent of internally displaced Iraqis and where WFP began providing vouchers for food to hungry people in November. The vouchers allow people to make their own choices and, as they are spent in local shops, help strengthen the area's economy.

Despite that, some have chosen not to head North, as they say it is too expensive. Many displaced people who went to the South of the country now live in unoccupied public buildings, mosques known as Husseineyats that local authorities have provided as shelter, or with host communities.

“In August of 2014, WFP established a sub-office in Basrah dedicated to supporting internally displaced Iraqis in the southern governorates. The office is exploring different ways to expand assistance to displaced families,” said Asif Niazi, coordinator of WFP southern operations.

Most families displaced to southern Iraq told the WFP assessment team that they spent the little savings that they had on transportation to get there and now struggle to feed their families or know where their next meal will come from. Najat Hussein, a 36 year-old mother of six, lost her husband seven months ago in the conflict in Tel Afar.

“I moved to Kerbala because it is expensive elsewhere and I need shelter for my children,” she told WFP. “We receive WFP food rations every month. Without this help I would be begging for food.”

WFP delivers large amounts of food each year to all of Iraq's 18 governorates in the form of monthly food parcels that contain items such as wheat flour, cooking oil, rice and pasta, offering families nourishing meals. Others still on the move receive immediate response rations that include canned food.

The assessment team also spoke to officials from the three southern governorates to discuss food assistance to displaced people in the region whose numbers add to a total of 1.4 million displaced across the country.

“We thank the local governments of Najaf, Kerbala and Babel for their continued cooperation with WFP to alleviate the suffering of displaced Iraqis and helping us provide them with food,” said Ms. Pearce.
**Lack of funds forces UN agency to halt Gaza programme for repairs to destroyed homes**

27 January - The United Nations agency tasked with assisting Palestinian refugees across the Middle East announced today that a major funding shortfall has forced the suspension of its cash assistance programme that would have helped families in Gaza repair their homes and provide rental subsidies to people left homeless after last year’s conflict in the enclave.

Announcing the suspension, the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) said in a press release “virtually none” of the funds pledged by donors at an international conference in Cairo last year has reached Gaza, and that it will need some $100 million in the first quarter of 2015.

Over 96,000 Palestine refugee family homes were damaged or destroyed during last summer's conflict and overall, $720 million is required to address this need, according to UNRWA. To date, the agency has received only $135 million in pledges, leaving a shortfall of $585 million.

“People are desperate and the international community cannot even provide the bare minimum – for example a repaired home in winter – let alone a lifting of the blockade, access to markets or freedom of movement. We've said before that quiet will not last, and now the quiet is at risk,” said Robert Turner, the agency’s Director in Gaza.

While some funds remain available to begin the reconstruction of totally destroyed homes, UNRWA has exhausted all funding to support repairs and rental subsidies.

“UNRWA in Gaza has so far provided over $77 million to 66,000 Palestine refugee families to repair their homes or find a temporary alternative,” Mr. Turner said, emphasizing that while this in itself is a "tremendous achievement," it is wholly insufficient.

"It is easy to look at these numbers and lose sight of the fact that we are talking about thousands of families who continue to suffer through this cold winter with inadequate shelter. People are literally sleeping amongst the rubble; children have died of hypothermia," he stressed.

Of the $5.4 billion pledged at the Cairo conference last October to help Palestinians rebuild from last summer's war, "virtually none of it has reached Gaza," he added.

“It is unclear why this funding has not been forthcoming,” said Mr. Turner. “But UNRWA has been a stabilizing factor in a very challenging political and security context and if we cannot continue the programme, it will have grave consequences for affected communities in Gaza.”

The Agency warned that if did not receive the $100 million, it would not be able to continue to provide rental subsidies fearing that large numbers of families may return to the collective centers, where almost 12,000 displaced Palestinians continue to seek shelter.
South Sudan: UN welcomes demobilization of child soldiers amid signs of peace

27 January - The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is celebrating the release of some 3,000 South Sudanese child soldiers today in what is being hailed as one of the largest ever demobilizations of children in a zone of conflict.

“These children have been forced to do and see things no child should ever experience,” UNICEF South Sudan Representative Jonathan Veitch stated in a press release. “The release of thousands of children requires a massive response to provide the support and protection these children need to begin rebuilding their lives.”

An initial group of 280 children – ranging from 11 to 17 years of age – were released by the South Sudan Democratic Army (SSDA) Cobra Faction at the village of Gumuruk in South Sudan's eastern Jonglei State. The release was marked by a ceremony overseen by UNICEF and the South Sudan National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission during which the child soldiers reportedly surrendered their weapons and uniforms. Further phased releases of the other children are planned over the coming month.

According to the UN agency, some of the child soldiers have been fighting for up to four years and many have never attended school. In the last year alone, 12,000 children, mostly boys, have been recruited and used as soldiers by armed forces and groups in South Sudan as a whole.

The security situation in South Sudan deteriorated steadily over the past year since political in-fighting between South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and his former deputy, Riek Machar, started in mid-December 2013. The hostilities subsequently turned into a full-fledged conflict that has sent nearly 100,000 civilians fleeing to UNMISS bases around the country. The crisis has uprooted an estimated 1.9 million people and placed more than 7 million at risk of hunger and disease.

Nonetheless, a recent peace deal between the warring factions has fostered hope of a definitive end to the year-long conflict.

In its press release, UNICEF explained that it is currently working to trace and reunify the children with their families, a “daunting” task due to the more than 1 million children who have either been displaced internally or have fled to neighbouring countries since fighting broke out.

In the meantime, the UN agency is supporting the former child soldiers with basic health care and protection services and necessities such as food, water and clothing to help them get ready to return to their families. Moreover, counselling and other psychological support programmes are urgently being established as well as access to education and skills training programmes.

Mr. Veitch warned, however, that the successful application of such programmes demanded significant resources.

UNICEF, in fact, estimates the costs for the release and reintegration of each child at $2,330 for a two-year period. Although some funding has been forthcoming, the agency is appealing for an additional $10 million.

For her part, Leila Zerrougui, the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, celebrated the demobilization, adding that the release of the child soldiers was “a step in the right direction.”

“Helping them take back their lives must be a priority,” she declared in a statement. “I call on the international community to provide sufficient resources to ensure they have access to the support that will help them heal and return to a peaceful life.”
South Sudan is one of seven countries highlighted in the UN's ongoing “Children, Not Soldiers” campaign which aims to end the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces in conflict by the end of 2016. During the Special Representative's visit to South Sudan in June 2014, the Government recommitted to the full implementation of its action plan with the United Nations to end the recruitment and use of children in the Sudan People's Liberation Army. In May, Riek Machar, signed a commitment with the Special Representative to end all grave violations against children.

"Today's release of children is a step in the right direction, but we cannot forget that thousands more have been recruited by all parties to the conflict," Ms. Zerrougui continued. “I urge the Government of South Sudan and the opposition led by Riek Machar to honor their commitments. The release of children in their ranks is long overdue.”

World must 'wake up' to enormity of Central African Republic crisis, warns UN relief official

27 January - The top United Nations humanitarian official in the Central African Republic (CAR) is calling for increased protection of displaced communities in the northern town of Batangafo, where relief agencies are working hard to ease suffering as the country's ongoing conflict drives a steady stream of terrified people into the area seeking safety.

Senior Humanitarian Coordinator Claire Bourgeois visited Batangafo over the weekend to assess the increasing protection needs in the area caused by a continuous influx of newly displaced persons (IDP). There are now more than 30,000 IDPs in the main site of the city, according to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

"This will stop the daily influx of hundreds of displaced people arriving at the site searching for safety; it will facilitate the return to their places of origins; and, at the same time, will enable humanitarian actors to reach people in need in areas where activities are now interrupted due to safety concerns," Mrs. Bourgeois said.

Mrs. Bourgeois was accompanied on her visit by representatives of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN refugee agency (UNHCR), World Health Organization (WHO), and other humanitarian partners.

The delegation met with the Committee of Wise Men, representatives of the Pheul community, non-governmental organizations and IDPs themselves in Batangafo, to discuss their basic needs and the challenges impeding their return to their places of origin.

OCHA notes that the most urgent needs identified were: improvement of the security and protection of civilians, and assistance to newly arrived displaced people. The mission participants called on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and protect civilians and humanitarian workers in CAR.

“The world needs to wake up to the enormity of the crisis in CAR. This is one of the most serious humanitarian emergencies in the world. We urgently need more action and more commitment. Action to protect civilians must be the top priority for all actors,” Mrs. Bourgeois added.

Her strong call comes following the launch last Friday by UNHCR of its latest funding appeal to help more than 450,000 Central African Republic refugees struggling to survive across the region. The $331 million appeal presented seeks to
provide safety, food, clean water, shelter, health and other basic services to people, which the agency expects will be seeking refuge in Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Republic of the Congo by the end of the year.

More than two years of civil war and sectarian violence have displaced thousands of people in the CAR amid continuing clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka alliance and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian CAR faces a humanitarian crisis of major proportions. Nearly a million people have been displaced and 2.7 million people, over half of the population, are in dire need of immediate assistance.

**UN moves swiftly to help people in south-eastern Ukraine forced to flee deadly weekend blast**

**27 January** - The United Nations refugee agency said it has “reacted swiftly” to help people forced to flee their homes when the south-eastern Ukrainian town of Mariupol came under rocket fire over the weekend, providing plastic sheeting for shelter construction.

"We provided basic relief items to help the local authorities and victims of this shelling and now we are emptying our stockpiles of emergency supplies to cover the needs as soon as possible," Oldrich Andrysek, regional representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said yesterday.

UNHCR distributed on Saturday and Sunday enough sheeting to help more than 1,000 people whose homes were damaged or destroyed when the strategically important port town came under fire, killing at least 30 people and injuring dozens.

Before handing out the sheeting with local municipal authorities and emergency services officials, the agency conducted a rapid assessment of affected areas and identified many people with urgent needs, particularly older persons, those living with disability, and female-headed households with large numbers of children.

Meanwhile, UNHCR said it is also distributing blankets, thermal clothing and sleeping bags to people lacking heating in their homes. Additionally, blankets, bed linens, towels and thermal clothes have been delivered to hospitals in Mariupol.

In the coming days, UNHCR plans to deliver roofing materials to families whose homes have been damaged in Mariupol, as well as the villages of Sartana and Talakivka. As it stands now, construction materials are in short supply and the sheeting can be used to create a makeshift shelter and cover holes.

Fighting between the Ukrainian armed forces and anti-government combatants has left hundreds of thousands of people displaced. A ceasefire was agreed on in September, but, says the agency, the conflict has flared up again and has been intense in parts of the east in recent days.
'We are being tested again,' Ban warns as UN marks 70 years since Auschwitz liberation

27 January - Seventy years ago today, allied forces liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau, the German Nazi concentration and extermination camp, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, urging renewed vigilance to eradicate the deep roots of hatred as anti-Semitic attacks continue and vulnerable communities around the world bury their dead while living in fear of further violence.

“More than a million inmates, primarily Jews, were brutally and systematically killed in the place where the Nazis introduced the monstrous concept of 'industrialized murder.' Among the other victims were non-Jewish Poles, political prisoners, Soviet prisoners of war, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, disabled persons and Jehovah's witnesses,” Mr. Ban said in his remarks on the day.

“Unprecedented in human history, this mass killing was motivated by the perverse, race-based ideology of the Nazis, who sought to track down and kill every last Jew and any others they considered to be inferior,” added the Secretary-General.

The International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust is marked every year on 27 January, the date on which Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated in 1945. This year's observance, on the theme 'Liberty, Life and the Legacy of the Holocaust Survivors', coincides with two milestone events: the 70th anniversary of the Second World War's end and the founding of the UN.

“Humankind united to overcome the Nazi menace. Today, we are being tested again. Minorities everywhere often face bigotry. Sectarian tensions and other forms of intolerance are on the rise,” Mr. Ban emphasized as he pledged the commitment of the UN to protecting the vulnerable, promoting fundamental human rights and upholding the freedom, dignity and worth of every person.

The overall mission of the United Nations was shaped by the tragedy of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the Secretary-General explained. Both the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrine the principles of human rights for all peoples around the world.

“The violence and bias we see every day are stark reminders of the distance still to travel in upholding human rights, preventing genocide and defending our common humanity. We must redouble our efforts to eradicate the deep roots of hatred and intolerance. People everywhere must unite to stop the cycles of discord and build a world of inclusion and mutual respect,” Mr. Ban declared.

For the past decade, the Holocaust and the UN Outreach Programme has mobilized students and educators around the world to help us achieve these goals, the UN chief said. “We are grateful to our many partners including Holocaust survivors who have contributed to this work, which spanned 42 countries in the past year alone.”

This year's events include the annual ceremony, exhibits, a film screening, discussions and a special exhibit that recognizes the work of the Holocaust and the UN Outreach Programme since its creation 10 years ago by the UN General Assembly.

With UN Headquarters closed today due to inclement weather, the annual General Assembly commemoration of the International Day has been rescheduled for Wednesday, 28 January. The event will feature remarks from, among others, the Secretary-General, Israel's President Reuven Rivlin, a Holocaust survivor, and a Soviet Army veteran. Mr. Avner Shalev, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate, will deliver the keynote address. Grammy-award winning violinist Miri Ben-Ari and Cantor Shimmy Miller, Congregation Ahavath Torah, will recite the memorial prayers accompanied by keyboardist Daniel Gildar.
El Salvador’s pardon for woman jailed for miscarriage should pave way for review of similar sentences – UN experts

28 January - The decision by El Salvador to pardon a woman convicted of aggravated homicide after suffering a miscarriage must “mark a turning point” for the authorities to review the sentences against all women jailed for pregnancy-related complications, a group of United Nations human rights experts said today.

Last week, the Central American nation announced that it had pardoned Carmen Guadalupe Vásquez Aldana, who suffered a miscarriage at 18 after reportedly being raped and was sentenced to 30 years in prison in February 2008.

“The decision to pardon Carmen Guadalupe Vásquez Aldana, following a judicial review which concluded that due process had been violated, reverses an appallingly unfair sentence and we wholeheartedly welcome it,” the experts said said in a statement.

“But there are many more women imprisoned on similar charges, some of them awaiting decisions on a pardon. We further urge the authorities to repeal legislation which criminalises abortion in all circumstances,” they added.

There are currently 17 women imprisoned in El Salvador on similar abortion charges. Nine of whom are currently seeking pardons; one woman was released after completing her sentence. The other six cases have already come before the Supreme Court which decided not to pardon them. The Parliamentary Assembly is due to consider the case of nine of the women in the coming month and the experts urged the competent authorities to pardon them.

“We would like to reiterate our concern that in the cases of the 17 women who were seeking pardons, sanctions were disproportionately imposed without due process,” the experts said.

Since 1997, El Salvador has had one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world, with abortion criminalized even when the woman's life or health is at risk or in cases of rape or incest. A constitutional amendment in 1998 defined life to begin at conception. Charges against women who suffer pregnancy-related complications are often being classified as aggravated homicide, which carries not only stiffer sentences but unwarranted stigma associated with their situation.

“The total ban on abortion disproportionatetly affects women who are poor. Furthermore, matters relating to an obstetric complication can sometimes mistakenly be considered as abortion,” said the experts.

“El Salvador must comply with its international obligations and ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including maternal health care and access to all methods of modern contraception. Access to safe and legal abortion, at least when the pregnancy endangers the life or health of the woman; when it is the result of rape or incest, or in cases of severe fetal malformation must be ensured,” they added.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), restrictive abortion laws do not reduce the number of abortions. Instead, they force women to seek clandestine and unsafe abortions, which jeopardise their lives and their health.

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.

The team examining El Salvador’s abortion laws is compiled of the Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice; Chair- Rapporteur on the Working Group on arbitrary detention; Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; Special Rapporteur on Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; and Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.
After Davos, UN paves way forward in addressing ‘most pressing global challenges’

28 January - On the heels of the 2015 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the United Nations has reiterated its commitment to leading the charge on development, gender equality and climate issues by including the voices of the global citizenry in the decision-making process and leveraging breakthrough technologies to create more participatory systems.

2015 is set to be a critical year for the UN and its Member States as they confront the imminent deadline for achieving the landmark Millennium Development Goals (MDG), lay the foundation of the proposed sustainable development goals (SDGs) and work to achieve a meaningful global agreement at the end-of-year Paris climate conference in an effort to ensure that no one is left behind.

In addition, the energetic debate around the future SDGs is widely considered to be a chance to reflect on the international community’s successes and failures, and invest in resilience by placing the most vulnerable, especially children, at the centre of the UN’s forward-looking efforts in elaborating a post-2015 agenda. According to the Organization, this means shifting from an agenda that prioritizes the more achievable targets, to a universal agenda that prioritizes tackling vulnerability, by identifying and mitigating risks. This is our collective and ambitious vision for the fight against poverty.

“The new development agenda is about identifying vulnerable groups and risks, mobilising new change-makers, empowering women and building resilience,” affirmed Assistant Secretary-General Thomas Gass.

At the heart of the UN’s efforts, however, lies a critical need to create solidarity movements that connect citizens together across the globe, build resilience in communities and tackle fragility through new partnerships between governments, the private sector and citizens themselves.

To that point, the UN is tapping into new technologies to build and drive movements of young people who are rising up to make their voices heard. Citizen-sparked campaigns fuelled by digital media, for instance, are helping to drive social movements which are ushering a new era of partnerships and political change.

Among the inclusionary campaigns launched by the UN at Davos, UN Women’s HeForShe IMPACT 10X10X10 generated particular enthusiasm as it begins its focus on engaging governments, businesses and universities to make concrete commitments to advance women’s empowerment.

At the same time, other initiatives, such as the #NoLostGeneration campaign, will help direct public attention towards those millions of children affected by the Syria crisis by harnessing breakthrough technologies. The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) office in Jordan, for example, partnered with video artist and filmmaker, Chris Milk, to produce Clouds Over Sidra – a virtual reality experience that transports viewers to a Syrian refugee camp. By leveraging breakthrough technologies, such as virtual reality, UNICEF and partners can create solidarity with those who are normally excluded and overlooked, amplifying their voices and explaining their situations in compelling ways.

These partnerships also signify a new shift in communication and the use of technology for development with a focus on creating empathetic immersive experiences and engaging new audiences. It is hoped that projects such as this will add to the discourse, amplifying people’s voices and inspiring leaders to make bold commitments first at Davos and throughout the year.
Libya: UN Secretary General condemns ‘in the strongest terms’ attack on hotel in Tripoli

28 January - The United Nations Secretary-General has condemned today, in the strongest terms, the attack that took place at the Corinthians Hotel, in Tripoli yesterday.

"Terrorism has no place in the new Libya and will not undermine the ongoing political dialogue which the United Nations is facilitating," the Secretary-General’s spokesperson said in a statement released today, in which he also expressed his condolences to the families of those who lost their lives.

The UN chief also commended the courage of the Libyan actors who are participating in the dialogue to find a peaceful and negotiated solution to the crisis.

Yesterday, the UN Security Council also condemned the attack and reaffirmed full support for Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Bernardino León, and urged all the parties in Libya to engage constructively with his efforts to resume an inclusive political process aimed at addressing the political and security challenges facing the country.

The Council's call for constructive engagement comes as participants in the Libyan dialogue facilitated by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), which Mr. León heads, concluded two days of discussions held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

According to a press statement from UNSMIL, the discussions were conducted in a positive atmosphere reflecting the sense of national responsibility and a sincere determination to find solutions to end the political and military conflict buffeting their country.

Participants, continued the Mission, discussed the issue of the formation of a consensual national unity government to ensure the unity of the country and State institutions. This includes the government's mandate, program, the decision-making process as well as the criteria for selecting its members.

“Participants also discussed how this government could benefit from UNSMIL support to carry out its tasks and the guarantees the international community could provide in this regard and in dealing with anyone who obstructs the political and security process,” said the statement.

New plan can generate 2.1 million jobs in Europe by mid-2018 – UN labour agency

28 January - A new plan put forth by the European Commission could generate over 2.1 million new jobs in Europe by mid-2018, a much-needed boost for the region, where employment remains fragile and uneven, the United Nations labour agency said today as it stressed the need to fast-track the proposal’s implementation to see results as soon as this year.

The new International Labour Organization (ILO) report entitled An Employment-Oriented Investment Strategy for Europe, shows that a combination of public and private sector investment worth 315 billion euros might foster Europe’s competitiveness and help tackle the jobs crisis.

In a statement to the press, Director of the ILO Research Department, Raymond Torres, indicated that the proposal “can complement the monetary measures recently announced by the European Central Bank, by encouraging enterprise
investment, growth and job creation.”

But in order to make a significant dent on unemployment, the plan must first include a significant portion of private investment, especially among job-rich small enterprises. It should also address the wide disparities in unemployment that exist across the EU, so that economies with greater need can benefit from the fund. In the absence of these two conditions, the plan will make little or no difference to the EU employment outlook, the ILO warned.

The challenge now is to ensure that policy-makers at the EU level avoid a “business as usual” scenario that would result in funds being diverted away from countries and sectors that are most in need. In addition, it is crucial for the plan to be accompanied by a longer-term employment strategy that focuses on quality jobs and balanced reforms.

Throughout Europe, the average unemployment rate stands at around 10 per cent, close to 3 percentage points above the rate reached before the start of the global crisis in 2008. Moreover, half of those unemployed have been without a job for more than a year, with women and youth disproportionately affected.

There are also wide cross-country disparities, with unemployment rates in Southern Europe and parts of Central Europe stubbornly high. As of the third quarter 2014, the unemployment rate in Spain was over 23 per cent and in Greece above 25 per cent. Three years prior, both countries had unemployment rates of 8 per cent.

“These developments have imposed huge economic and social costs, with the worst impacts in Southern Europe but with damage to households and working people across the region,” explained Sandra Polaski, ILO Deputy Director-General for Policy. “The urgency to address these losses increases with every passing day.”

People who have been unemployed for long periods of time are more likely to become discouraged and leave the labour market altogether. And as skills erode, workers’ employability deteriorates – making it increasingly difficult for workers to find a new job when the labour market begins to recover. This issue is of particular relevance for youth.

**Farmers in southern Malawi in urgent need after intense flooding, UN agency warns**

Torrential rains in Malawi have caused dozens of deaths, with hundreds of people still missing. Photo: UNDP/Arjan van de Merwe

28 January - The United Nations agriculture agency is working closely with Malawi’s Government on a $16 million response plan aimed at protecting farmers from severe flooding that has destroyed fields and homes, washed away animals and crops, and threatens local food security.

“Failure to respond promptly will have lasting consequences,” said Florence Rolle, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Representative to Malawi. “Flood-hit families risk harvesting nothing or very little this year, leaving them food insecure at the very outset of the agricultural season and undermining much of the progress being made in reducing food insecurity in Malawi.” she said.

The Government hopes its plan will help to put affected farmers back on track to plant and harvest food during the agricultural season, and FAO will work closely with them to supply short-cycle varieties of maize, rice, sweet potato, cowpeas, vegetable seeds and cassava cuttings for urgent replanting. The hope is that some fields and crops could be ready by June, mitigating the need to rely on long-term humanitarian programs.

At the same time, local families need new livestock to ensure animal protein intake, and irrigation facilities must be restored before the dry season to ensure food production. Untold numbers of goats and chickens have perished where waters rose with unexpected speed, while remaining livestock is at heightened risk of disease outbreaks.

Malawi is regularly hit by floods and droughts, requiring emergency responses of varying size each year. This year, flooding has caused displacement of over 170,000 people, while an estimated 116,000 households have lost their crops and livestock. In Nsanje district alone, 79 people are confirmed dead with another 153 people still missing.
This year’s rains have come ahead of their usual schedule, repeatedly bursting the banks along the Shire and Ruo rivers, and warnings of flash floods remain in place, with more rain forecast for the country’s North.

The floods come after last year saw a bumper maize harvest, with overall cereal production rising by 8 per cent, reducing core food prices and cutting by more than half the number of people assessed as food insecure.

With 86 per cent of the population living in rural areas and engaged in farming and livestock rearing, long-term watershed management infrastructures are urgently needed so that even intense flooding is less damaging than this year.

The FAO has been working closely with the Government and other partners in Malawi to build more resilient livelihoods and reduce exposure to risks such as floods and dry spells. Last year, working alongside the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), the FAO piloted an approach to building resilience, which integrates nutrition education, climate smart agricultural practices and disaster risk reduction.

UN expert urges Kazakhstan to boost rights of peaceful assembly, association

28 January - An independent United Nations rights expert today urged the Government of Kazakhstan to match the country’s economic successes of the past quarter century with a ramped-up focus on human rights by opening up the Central Asian state's democratic spaces.

Returning from an official visit to Kazakhstan, Maina Kiai, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, noted that the Kazakh Government had developed a tendency to focus on restrictions rather than human rights themselves, adding that this had resulted in a situation where rights were treated as privileges to be granted at the discretion of State authorities.

“Although authorities repeatedly make reference to the 'rule of law', the practice in Kazakhstan reflects strong adherence to 'rule by law','” Mr. Kiai said in a press release issued earlier today. “Law is meant to serve people, rather than people serving the law.”

Among the more pressing rights issues facing the country, the UN expert pointed out that the Government's regulation of peaceful assemblies had become increasingly becoming problematic as all peaceful assemblies now required the go-ahead from local authorities and, even then, were limited to specific, government-designated sites.

During Mr. Kiai’s visit, in fact, a number of individuals from around the country announced their intentions to organize peaceful rallies in eight cities from 24 January to 27 January. Local authorities, however, reportedly rejected the requested locations and some of the individuals were subsequently detained. A few of the peaceful assemblies were eventually permitted but took place in designated areas.

Mr. Kiai applauded the Kazakh Government's efforts to maintain cohesion in the country but warned that “maintaining stability” could also be “misused to wrongfully curtail the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly.”

“People who are not allowed to air their grievances peacefully are more likely to air them violently, or find succour in extremist ideologies,” he added. “International human rights law is clear that limitations on this right cannot impair the essence of the right itself. Unfortunately, in Kazakhstan today the freedom of assembly is treated as a privilege, or a favour, rather than a right.”

At the same time, while noting that freedom of association is also nominally guaranteed by Kazakhstan's Constitution, Mr. Kiai cautioned that “a web of laws and practices” had limited the freedom of political parties, public associations, trade unions, and religious associations, according to the press release.
The political association, Alga!, for instance, was denied registration after seven years of attempts to register as a political party while several public associations have been denied registration based on apparently “flimsy reasons,” such as mistakes in completing applications.

During his nine-day mission, which included visits to Almaty, Aktau, and the capital, Astana, Mr. Kiai also visited Zhanaozen, where clashes between police and protesters in 2011 led to the deaths of at least 14 people.

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.

**Caribbean and Latin American Summit take up UN agency anti-hunger plan**

28 January - A new plan to combat hunger in the Caribbean and Latin America presented by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is being considered for adoption at a summit of the region’s leaders taking place today and tomorrow in the Costa Rican capital.

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva presented on Tuesday the new regional Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication by 2025 at summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in San José, Costa Rica.

“This proposal is a tool to help CELAC countries design national plans to transform their commitment to eradicating hunger and extreme poverty in the region into a reality,” said Mr. Graziano da Silva, and later added via social media that CELAC leaders were considering the plan.

FAO, in a press release issued Tuesday, said: “The plan was developed by FAO – with support from the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) – at the request of CELAC governments.”

“It is based on four broad pillars: strategy coordination at the national and regional levels, with a special focus on gender issues; sustainably ensuring access to safe and nutritious foods; widening school feeding programmes with a priority on addressing all forms of malnutrition, from under-nutrition to obesity, and; tackling the challenges posed to food security by climate change,” according to FAO.

The plan seeks to identify and establish links that can generate “virtuous circles of development,” the food agency said, citing as an example linking family farming with school feeding programmes.

According to FAO, Latin America and the Caribbean represent the only region in the world which has collectively achieved the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015. And the region is set to reach the more stringent World Food Summit goal of halving the total number of undernourished people.
UN rights experts applaud Netherlands Government decision to help homeless migrants

28 January - A group of United Nations human rights experts has welcomed the decision by the Government of the Netherlands to grant funding for municipalities that provide emergency shelters to homeless migrants in a reversal from the Dutch authorities’ earlier position.

In a press release issued earlier today, Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, François Crépeau, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, and Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, greeted the Dutch Government’s announcement as “a significant change” from its earlier stance.

The Government had previously refused to give emergency food, clothing, and shelter (popularly called “bed, bath and bread” in the country), despite repeated disapproval by international and regional human rights bodies.

In December, the European Committee of Social Rights, a body that oversees the European Social Charter, decided in two separate cases that the Netherlands was violating the right to emergency assistance of adult homeless irregular migrants. At the same time, the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights also expressed concern about the problem.

The UN Special Rapporteurs, meanwhile, suggested that Dutch politicians were trying to score “political points” at the expense of the homeless irregular migrants in the national debate about immigration.

“We commend the Dutch government for recognising by its change of position that anyone, irrespective of whether their stay in a country is lawful, has the right to an adequate standard of living, including food, clothing and housing, and that the responsible government is obliged to allocate resources consistent with its international human rights obligations,” the UN experts declared.

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Mr. Aston, Mr. Crépeau and Ms. Farha said they looked forward to hearing from the Government in “more detail” and “as soon as possible” about their next steps to ensure that the municipalities do, indeed, receive the necessary funding, adding that they would closely monitor developments in the country.