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At main UN economic and social body, former US President Clinton calls for partnerships to boost health

28 May - As the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) met to discuss the role of partnerships in achieving the Post-2015 development agenda, the focus fell on the recent response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa and the need to work together to boost capacity in healthcare systems.

Martin Sajdik, President of the Council, opened the meeting by stressing the importance of partnerships, especially in the context of the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the post-2015 development agenda and he introduced a keynote speaker, in Bill Clinton, the former President of the United States, who he said was “truly outstanding” and who would discuss health partnerships, especially for strengthening health systems.

In an opening keynote address to the ECOSOC Partnership Forum,

Mr. Clinton described the huge impact of Ebola on West Africa and the huge effort made by many stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, international organizations and the private sector, in its aftermath. During a recent visit to the region, he said he heard the same call again and again: “Help us build our health systems.”

Countries in the region were requesting funds to build better, stronger health systems through multi-year plans. If the donor community set aside 15 per cent of relief funds over a three- to seven-year span to build up those systems, “we wouldn’t have to worry about these problems,” he said, urging donor nations to help strengthen health sectors, which would save
money in the long-run and make nations more self-sufficient.

“They have to have health systems or we’ll be back here four or five years from now – not in these countries but in some other countries,” said Mr. Clinton. “It is the most economically sensible thing to do.”

He said the biggest struggle of the 21st century world is the battle between inclusion and exclusion, noting that partnerships are needed to achieve both peace and development objectives.

He described a Clinton Health Initiative programme launched in cooperation with the Rwandan Government and other partners, which aimed at better resourcing and building up the country’s health systems. He said that work such as the project he described in Rwanda should be done everywhere.

He called on members to “exalt” partnerships, to bring together partners that would not traditionally have worked together, and to “tell people what we’re doing” in order to secure the necessary funding. Long-term investments and broad-based partnerships were critical.

Jan Eliasson, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, said the unprecedented global health crisis that was the Ebola outbreak was part of a series of challenges contributing to the most challenging period since the creation of the UN.

“One thing is clear: No single entity – no single nation or organization, can solve the problems alone,” he said. “I believe a new model for problem solving is required in today’s world. We need to put the problems at the centre and mobilize all actors to achieve effective change. We have to move from the vertical – ‘silo’ – approach to the horizontal, crosscutting one.”

He pointed to the global response to Ebola and the impact of the collective contributions of the international community but stressed that the priority remained to “get to zero cases and to stay there.”

All across the development agenda that would be finalized in meetings across the UN system in Addis Ababa, New York and Paris this year, partnerships would become more and more vital and he said that they would work only if they were transparent, inclusive and accountable and in line with the values and principles of the United Nations.

Mr. Sajdik also used his speech to emphasize the need for fresh thinking and even more new ideas on how best to harness the broadest range of actors in support of the new development objectives.

“We know when going forward we will need to ensure strong coherence and clear, equally applicable standards on reporting,” he said. “Earlier this year, in February, the Economic and Social Council undertook a preliminary discussion of these issues, and our Forum will build on that discussion today.”

**Despite growing threats, UN peacekeepers worldwide remain dedicated to serve**

28 May - More than one million military, police and civilian personnel have served as United Nations peacekeepers over the years, and despite growing security threats and the sacrifices that come with being deployed in challenging environments, over 100,000 men and women continue to work for the cause of peace.

“This is one of the most admirable features in peacekeeping, that despite all the dangers and the risks… they want to go to these places and contribute,” said Edmond Mulet, Assistant Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations.

“This is what we admire and we appreciate enormously and it’s why we have UN Peacekeepers Day, in order to express our gratitude to them,” he added during an interview with the UN News Centre.
The International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, observed annually on 29 May, is an occasion to pay tribute to all the men and women who have served and continue to serve in UN peacekeeping operations and to honour the memory of those who have lost their lives in the cause of peace.

In its 70 years, the United Nations has established 71 peacekeeping operations. More than one million people have served as peacekeepers, helping countries gain independence, supporting historic elections, protecting civilians, disarming hundreds of thousands of ex-combatants, establishing the rule of law, promoting human rights and creating the conditions for refugees and displaced persons to return home.

“It’s about tremendous gratitude to those people, men and women, and to the countries who actually contribute them, because without them, the partnership that is peacekeeping simply could not work,” Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous told the UN News Centre.

Today, there are more than 107,000 uniformed peacekeepers from 122 troop- and police-contributing countries serving in 16 missions. However, their service does not come without costs.

More than 3,300 women and men serving the organization as peacekeepers have lost their lives since the UN’s first operation in 1948. This year marks the seventh successive year in which the UN will honour more than 100 ‘blue helmets’ who lost their lives the previous year while serving the cause of peace.

“Almost every day now, we’re losing peacekeepers around the world, especially in Mali,” noted Mr. Mulet. “Mali has become the most dangerous mission we have right now.”

Earlier this week, another peacekeeper serving with the UN operation in Mali, known as MINUSMA, was killed, bringing the number of fatalities to 50 since the mission was established two years ago. For the UN, the safety and security of its staff is paramount.

“Given the nature of the challenges that we are facing on the ground, we are experimenting with a number of new tools to improve the safety of our people but also to enhance the way they can perform their mandates,” said Mr. Ladsous.

The UN has modernized its operations, introduced new technologies, broadened its base of contributors and strengthened its partnerships with regional organizations. At the same time, demands far outpace resources, and better funding, training and equipment is required.

To assess the threats and explore how best to meet today’s challenges, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed a High-Level Independent Panel to assess the state of UN peace operations today and the emerging needs of the future. Mr. Ladsous believes the Panel’s report will be critical for the future of UN peacekeeping.

“I do hope, in fact I’m convinced, that that report, when it comes out sometime in mid-June, will actually help us chart the way ahead for the next 15 years or so of peacekeeping.”
Top UN relief official urges Security Council to save Syria from ‘hopelessness and further despair’

28 May - The Security Council must set aside its political differences and come together to find a solution for the “intractable” and drawn-out Syrian conflict, the top United Nations humanitarian official urged today as she warned the 15-member body that the situation in the country was “extremely grave and deteriorating by the day.”

“In the past weeks, we have seen more and more heinous acts,” said Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos in a briefing this afternoon. “Innocent men, women and children killed; maimed; displaced; and subjected to a savagery that no human should have to endure.”

Ms. Amos cited the aerial bombing of a market in Darkoush, in rural Idlib, at the end of April in which up to 50 people were killed and over 100 civilians wounded. The same market was hit once again last week with reports of twenty more people killed.

At the same time, the violent rampaging of militants aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continues to cause widespread devastation, she added. ISIL’s recent taking of Palmyra had resulted in the indiscriminate killing of civilians and “new depths of depravity” including “maiming, raping and destroying.”

Overall, some 12.2 million people, including 5.6 million children, need humanitarian assistance throughout Syria, according to the UN. And by conservative estimates, more than 220,000 Syrians have died in the conflict, but that number is likely much higher.

“People are trying to survive by the day, without the basic necessities of life such as water and electricity,” Ms. Amos continued. “And parties to the conflict continue to cut services, collectively punishing entire villages and cities in the process.”

However, despite reports of ongoing tragedies and the Security-Council’s previous efforts to end the violence and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid, the situation in the country has worsened.

“The international community more broadly needs to do more to protect civilians and ensure greater accountability for violations of international humanitarian law,” stated Ms. Amos.

She urged the Council “to demonstrate its leadership and uphold its responsibility” through specific measures, including ensuring the protection of civilians; ensuring that the parties to the conflict abide their international legal obligations; bringing an end to the siege of more than 400,000 people; considering all possible avenues to ensure accountability; stepping up financial support for humanitarian efforts; and respecting the non-political nature of humanitarian aid.

“I know that there are no easy answers or quick fixes,” she declared. “But I also know that we cannot let the difficult prevent us from upholding our responsibility to act on behalf of the people of Syria. We cannot leave Syrians abandoned to hopelessness and further despair.”

Today’s briefing was Ms. Amos’ last official address to the Council in her role as the UN’s humanitarian chief before she steps down from her post at the end of the month.
UN General Assembly calls for an immediate halt to ‘wanton’ destruction of Iraq’s cultural heritage

28 May - The United Nations General Assembly today expressed outrage that attacks on Iraq’s cultural heritage are being used as a tactic of war to spread terror and hatred, “a new phenomenon,” the head of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) labelled as a form of “cultural cleansing” threatening the people and security in the region.

UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova told reporters at UN Headquarters following the unanimous adoption by the General Assembly of the resolution Saving the cultural heritage of Iraq that she welcomed the development as a “turning point” in mobilizing the world to protect the heritage as well as cultural diversity in Iraq.

Ms. Bokova also said she believed the resolution is important as “it could identify cultural cleansing as a new phenomenon now that it is emerging as a threat to security of the people, security in the Middle East.”

UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, speaking on the adaption of the resolution “with a deep sense of serious and historic responsibility,” noted the “destruction of cultural heritage bears witness to a form of violent extremism that seeks to destroy the present, past and future of human civilization.”

That the destruction “is taking place today in Iraq, the cradle of Mesopotamian civilization, represents a loss not only for the Iraqi people, but truly for all of humanity,” Mr. Eliasson declared.

He also commended the work of UNESCO and its partners for assisting Member States’ efforts to protect Iraq’s antiquities and urged “all Member States, in cooperation with Interpol and other relevant authorities, to step up efforts to prevent the trade in items of cultural, scientific and religious importance illegally removed from Iraq.”

Speaking on behalf of General Assembly President Sam Kutesa, Vice-President Álvaro Mendonça e Moura expressed concern that barbaric and senseless attacks on irreplaceable artefacts of humanity’s shared cultural heritage were taking place with alarming frequency not only in Iraq but also in Afghanistan, Syria, Mali and elsewhere.

In keeping with the latest resolution, as well as to implement in “very concrete terms” an earlier Security Council resolution to counter financing of terrorism from the illegal trade of Iraqi cultural property, Ms. Bokova announced that she is planning to go to The Louvre Museum in Paris next week on June 1 to update the list of objects not to be exported or traded from Iraq.

The UNESCO chief was joined at the press conference by Maria Böheimer, Minister of State of Germany, and Mohamed Ali Alhakim, Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations, as the two countries that presented the resolution to the General Assembly, which was adopted with more than 70 co-sponsors.

She also said the passage of the resolution today “deeply resonates” with UNESCO’s mandate and its efforts to preserve cultural heritage in other countries of conflict like Syria, Libya, Mali and Yemen.

The General Assembly resolution focuses on the fight against the destruction of cultural heritage and the attacks against cultural diversity in Iraq and includes a set of measures to end the destruction and looting of archaeological sites and cultural artefacts in Iraq.

The four-page text calls for “an immediate halt to the wanton destruction of the cultural heritage of Iraq, including religious sites or objects, emphasizes that no such acts committed by ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) or other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida will be tolerated, and also calls for the preservation of the cultural heritage of Iraq by protecting cultural and religious properties and sites consistent with international humanitarian law.”
It also “stresses the importance of holding accountable perpetrators of attacks intentionally directed against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, or historic monuments.”

UN agriculture agency teams up with global wholesale markets union to boost urban food security

28 May - Recognizing the growing challenge of feeding city dwellers, who will become the world’s majority by 2050, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Union of Wholesale Markets today signed a partnership aimed at reaching the urban poor and reducing food waste estimated at 1.3 billion tonnes every year.

“More efficient wholesale markets, and overall urban market outlets, can result in more affordable means to reach the city poor with healthy food,” Eugenia Serova, head of FAO’s Agro-Industry Division said in a press release issued today in Budapest, Hungary, where the partnership agreement was being signed.

“If close to 90 per cent of the expected increase in the global urban population in the next two decades will take place in cities in Africa and Asia, it makes much sense to build solid knowledge on how to strengthen urban market systems,” according to Ms. Serova.

FAO said the partnership with the wholesalers, who function as brokers who sell agricultural goods purchased directly from producers in bulk to businesses and resellers, is aimed to promote sustainability and inclusiveness in the wholesale sector, including developing “best practices” for reducing food waste.

“Gathering more detailed information on how much food is lost and wasted at the wholesale level, developing sound procedures to improve logistic efficiencies in urban markets and with suppliers and buyers while preventing and managing waste across the sector are key goals of the partnership,” the agency said.

According to FAO, roughly one third of the food produced globally for human consumption – approximately 1.3 billion tonnes every year – is lost or wasted. The losses are increasingly concentrated in cities – over half of the world’s population today lives in cities, and by 2050 nearly two-thirds of people will be city dwellers.

FAO says it estimates that over 40 per cent of root crops, fruits and vegetables are lost wasted, along with 35 per cent of fish, 30 per cent of cereals and 20 per cent of meat and dairy products, and total food waste represents an economic value of some $1 trillion annually.

“By developing best practices for designs and operations of wholesale markets and a more efficient flow of information along the urban food supply chains, the new collaboration aims not only to cut down on food losses and waste but also to enhance producers’ access to markets, improve food handling, and make fresher, safer produce more equally available to city consumers,” it said.

The World Union of Wholesale Markets network connects wholesale marketers in 43 countries, according to FAO, making it an ideal partner in collecting data that will result in a series of reports and activities targeted at helping wholesalers find new ways to improve efficiencies, ensure better supplies of quality produce, and cut down on waste.
Burundi: senior UN officials step up engagement to ease country’s political crisis

28 May - The United Nations Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, arrived in Burundi today as the top UN political official met with a Burundian government representative at UN headquarters and discussed the need to prevent and investigate political violence and killings.

Also in Burundi today, a “consultative political dialogue” resumed today, under the facilitation of Said Djinnit, the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, with all parties being represented.

In a phone call yesterday to the Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said it was vital that Burundian stakeholders take concrete steps to de-escalate tensions and create an enabling environment for credible legislative elections to take place.

In New York, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman met today with the chargé d’affaires of the Burundi Mission to the United Nations, Anesie Ndayisimiye, and underlined that the Government needed to take concrete steps to prevent and investigate political violence and killings.

Mr. Feldman also said “there must be security of the electoral process; security for political and civil society actors; disarmament of armed civilians; strengthening of the national independent electoral commission (CENI); and provisions for the vote of refugees.”

He noted that the risk of escalation of violence remains in Burundi and that the UN’s Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide had arrived in the capital of Bujumbura today.

In his meeting with Ms. Ndayisimiye, Mr. Feltman underlined that “he Government must take concrete steps to prevent and investigate political violence and killings, as well as violence targeting journalists and other civil society representatives. He also stressed the importance of respect for the UN-backed Arusha Agreement going forward.

‘Use your voices to claim your rights,’ Ban urges university graduates in Belgium

28 May - Addressing the graduating class at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, where he was bestowed an honorary degree today, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gave students one final homework assignment: become global citizens with global vision.

“Use your voices to claim your rights and I will work as your ally,” Mr. Ban pledged. “Act with passion and compassion. Challenge your leaders, your professors, your presidents, prime minister and CEOs. Tell them you want to be at the negotiation table with them taking part in the decisions affecting your lives.”

“With this honorary degree, you give me another moral mission and I accept this moral mandate and mission as Secretary-General. I know that you ask the United Nations to do much more, and I am committing myself to work for world peace, development, and human rights,” he added.

Mr. Ban is in Belgium where yesterday he addressed the European Parliament on the migration crisis in the Mediterranean. He also met with the leadership of the European Commission and the European Council.

Speaking at Leuven, Mr. Ban said that this year’s 70th anniversary of the United Nations is a good moment to reflect on the
past, but even more importantly, a time to have a conversation about how to build a better future.

“We are also working at a deeper level, trying to nurture new generations of global citizens. Today, around the world, too many millions of children are out of school, and too many others do not get an education that matches the needs of today’s economy,” the UN chief continued.

He highlighted ways Belgium is involved on the global stage and encouraged the European nation to engage further in pushing for the adoption of sustainable development goals (SDGs) in September in New York and adopting a global agreement on climate change in December in Paris.

“We are the first generation that can put an end to poverty and we are the last generation that can put an end to climate change,” declared Mr. Ban, adding that the United Nations is working hard to address global challenges such as war, migration and education.

On migration, he said that what is happening on the European continent and in Southeast Asia, has taken on new urgency with tragic situations in the Mediterranean and Southeast Asia. Migrants are desperately trying to find a better life, but fall prey to perilous journeys, he said.

“I know we have all been saddened to see so many men, women and children lose their lives in the Mediterranean. Our efforts are aimed at saving lives but also resolving the conflicts and poverty that lead people to flee in the first place,” Mr. Ban emphasized.

But the United Nations cannot solve the crises of the world alone. It will need the full support of every citizen in the world.

“We have to shape the future development agenda, which will put us all on a sustainable path, where all the citizens of the world can live peacefully, harmoniously, where their dignity can be respected,” the UN chief said.

In Brussels today, Mr. Ban also met with the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, to welcome Europe’s proposal on migration, including the relocation of 40,000 asylum-seekers, as a step in the right direction. The two leaders also deplored terrorism and pledged to counter the violent extremism.

Also today, Mr. Ban briefed reporters on his meeting with Belgium’s Prime Minister Charles Michel. They also discussed efforts to promote peace in Central African Republic (CAR) and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and also the situations in Yemen, Libya, Syria and Burundi.

Prime Minister Michel and Mr. Ban also touched on sustainable development, climate change, and July’s conference on financing for development set to take place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

“This is an opportunity – a historic opportunity – to place the world on more sustainable footing, and I encouraged Belgium to continue doing its part to make this year a great success for the world’s people,” he said.
In phone conversation with Yemeni President, Ban expresses concern about uptick in fighting

28 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has voiced concern about the escalation of fighting in Yemen in a telephone conversation with the country's President, the United Nations has confirmed.

“The Secretary-General expressed his concern about the escalation of fighting on the ground and air strikes since the end of the humanitarian pause, and reiterated his firm belief that there is no military solution to the conflict,” the UN spokesperson's office said in a readout of Mr. Ban's exchange with Yemeni President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi Mansour.

The violence in the Gulf state continues to rumble on amid a worsening humanitarian crisis and despite wider UN-backed attempts to facilitate dialogue among national and regional stakeholders.

Just yesterday, the UN's health agency, the World Health Organization (WHO), confirmed that as Yemen enters its tenth week of conflict, nearly 2,000 people have been killed and 8,000 injured so far.

Meanwhile, political consultations originally scheduled for today in Geneva have been delayed until further notice.

In his telephone conversation with for President Hadi, the Secretary-General recalled that he had asked his Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, “to redouble his efforts” to consult with the Yemeni Government, Yemen's political groupings and countries in the region “with the aim of convening the Yemeni consultations in Geneva at the earliest possible opportunity.”

In addition, Mr. Ban voiced appreciation for President Hadi’s reaffirmation of his commitment to UN-brokered negotiations and full support for, and participation of his Government in, the Geneva consultations.

“The Secretary-General hoped that the consultations could resume as soon as possible,” the readout concluded.

Ban deplores shooting incident in Mali that killed one UN peacekeeper and injured another

28 May - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has deplored the shooting incident that took place in Bamako, Mali, on Monday, 25 May, during which a peacekeeper with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was killed and another injured.

“He expresses his sincere condolences to the family of the victim and the Government of Bangladesh. He wishes a speedy recovery to the injured peacekeeper,” said a statement released from Mr. Ban’s spokesperson’s office today.

The Secretary-General also called on the Malian authorities to swiftly and thoroughly investigate the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice.

He also reaffirmed the willingness of MINUSMA to cooperate closely with Malian authorities in this effort.
UN envoy announces steps by Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders towards joint vision for united Cyprus

28 May - Today, the Greek Cypriot leader, Nicos Anastasiades, and the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mustafa Akinci, took the next steps towards fulfilling their joint vision for a united federal Cyprus, the United Nations Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Cyprus has confirmed.

"Their constructive dialogue included a range of core issues that go to the very heart of the Cyprus question," Espen Barth Eide said today in a statement delivered on behalf of the leaders.

"Mr. Akinci and Mr. Anastasiades underlined once again their shared will and determination to reach a comprehensive settlement. The two leaders believe that outcomes at the negotiating table should reflect the positive atmosphere prevailing on the island," he added.

Mr. Anastasiades and Mr. Akinci agreed that their next meetings will take place on Wednesday, 17 June, Monday, 29 June, Friday, 10 July and Monday, 27 July. In support of the leaders’ mutual commitment, the negotiating teams met five times over the past two weeks.

“They worked tirelessly on all aspects of the Cyprus issue in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of where the two sides currently stand,” Mr. Eide said, adding that progress was achieved in a number of areas.

The leaders agreed to make a strong appeal on the crucial humanitarian issue of missing persons.

Furthermore, as a sign of their mutual commitment, the leaders agreed to the following five concrete steps:

- To work towards the opening of more crossing points, starting with Lefka-Aplici and Deryneia. In addition, they referred a number of other proposed crossing points for further examination to the committee on crossings.
- They agreed to interconnect electricity grids, and to start taking the practical steps towards this goal.
- In the same vein, the leaders agreed on the desirability of mobile telephone interoperability. The two leaders want this issue to be solved. The leaders will therefore instruct the technical committee on economic and commercial matters, as well as their respective experts, to discuss and propose how this important issue can be solved.
- In parallel, work will commence to prevent radio frequency interferences.
- Last, but not least, the leaders agreed that the Cyprus issue can only be properly solved with due understanding of the perspectives of both women and men. To that effect, they agreed to establish a committee on gender equality.

Mr. Eide said that going forward, the leaders agreed to explore a range of other possible confidence-building measures in parallel to the substantive negotiations.
Security Council renews mandate of UN Mission in South Sudan

28 May - The Security Council today adopted a resolution extending the mandate of the United Nations mission in the country until 30 November 2015, giving the operation authorization to use all necessary means to protect civilians, monitor and investigate human rights, and create the conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Council members requested that the Secretary-General, through his Special Representative, continue to direct the operations of an integrated UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), coordinating all UN activities in the country and supporting a coherent international approach to achieving peace.

The draft decided that the military component of the Mission would comprise up to 12,500 troops and 1,323 police, requesting the Mission to work to continue to streamline its operations and expressing its intention to keep the requirements of and composition of UNMISS components under active review.

One of the requests the resolution made of the Mission’s forces is that they should ensure full compliance with the UN ‘zero tolerance’ policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and should keep the Council fully informed about the Mission's progress in that regard.

The text also called for immediate and full implementation of two agreements by the Government of South Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/A) in Opposition, expressing its intention to consider all appropriate measures against any party taking action to undermine peace, stability, and security in the country.

It urged all parties to join national dialogue to establish lasting peace, reconciliation and good governance, encouraging the efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and the UN to reach a peace agreement between the parties.

The text condemned in the strongest terms attacks on and threats made to UNMISS personnel and UN facilities, including repeated attacks on the Mission’s camps in Bur, Bentiu, Malakal and Melut, stressing that such attacks may constitute violations of the Status of Forces Agreement and/or war crimes.

It also condemned all violations of applicable international law, especially those involving children, and reports of rampant sexual violence, and urged investigations into all allegations of human rights violations and abuses, calling for accountability for anyone responsible, with all victims of sexual violence being assured equal protection under the law and equal access to justice.
At UN Asia-Pacific policy forum, leaders discuss post-2015 agenda, financing and partnerships

28 May - The 71st session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) opened its ministerial session today in Bangkok, as region’s leaders meet to discuss the integration and implementation of economic, social and environmental development with focus on financing and partnership.

“As we take the first steps in the next phase of our shared development journey, the people of Asia and the Pacific are poised to lead in economic growth, in social innovation and in environmental stewardship,” Shamshad Akhtar, ESCAP Executive Secretary, said at the opening of session.

She also encouraged regional leaders to focus on sustainable development and to “ensure that 2015 also marks the real start of the Asia-Pacific Century.”

The theme for this year’s session is ‘Balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: from integration to implementation,’ with emphasis on balancing and integrating the economic, environmental and social aspects of development.

In a message to the session, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon not only touted the crucial role ESCAP plays in the region, but he also stressed the important focus on climate change and sustainable development.

“Only if consumption and production patterns change can humanity create shared long-term prosperity,” said Mr. Ban.

ESCAP is accelerating regional connectivity with member states’ support, highlighted Ms. Akhtar, for shared prosperity especially in integrated transportation and accessible information.

Spotlighting the significance of financing with regional partners, Ms. Akhtar called for five key adjustments: enhance domestic market; pursue inclusive growth; drive structural reforms; strengthen regional partnership; and address gaps in genders, income and urban-rural areas.

Climate change, natural disasters, economic growth, and issues related to small island developing States have also been discussed in the forum.

Over 550 participants from 50 Member States and associate members are attending the 71st Commission session this week, making it the largest attendance of Pacific Heads of State and Government in recent history.
FEATURE: One UN peacekeeper's mission to improve prisons in Central African Republic

28 May - This is 35-year-old Oscar Ouedraogo’s first deployment with a United Nations peacekeeping mission. The native of Burkina Faso has been working as a corrections officer for the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) since 20 September 2014, in the capital, Bangui.

In his own country, Mr. Ouedraogo, who is from the northern city of Ouahigouya, worked in the corrections administration for eight years, including as Deputy Director of the prison in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, for about two years.

“My desire to work in a peacekeeping operation is the result of my experience in my country,” he explained in an interview with the UN News Centre, a few days before the celebration of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeeper, observed on 29 May.

“The objective of peacekeeping operations is to help give a smile to people struggling. And I think that when you have the opportunity to live in peace, it is your duty to work to bring that smile, that hope to other people,” he added.

Following several years of crisis, most detention centres in the Central African Republic have been destroyed. Of the 60 prisons that existed before the conflict, only two are now functional.

“The crisis has created a need for justice among the Central African population and meeting this need for justice requires that courts are functional, that prisons are also functional,” said Mr. Ouedraogo.

For example, the central prison of Ngaragba, in Bangui, currently houses nearly 700 detainees in a facility that has a capacity of 400.

In addition, the national corrections administration has just under 100 staff members for the whole country. They are not sufficiently trained and equipped and prison security is provided by the military, including the Republican Guard.

As part of the restoration of the rule of law in the country, MINUSCA is working to develop and implement, in close cooperation with the Central African authorities and its partners, a strategy for the gradual demilitarization of detention centres.

By 2018, the goal is to train 2,000 corrections officers so that the Central African detention centres can be managed by a corps of professionals.

Mr. Ouedraogo works in the human resources team of the Corrections Unit, within the Justice and Corrections Section of MINUSCA. The team is working to create a corps of personnel to manage the Central African corrections system and to promote the ideal corrections officer, one “who knows the rules that must be observed to ensure the most basic rights for the detainees.”

One of the lessons Mr. Ouedraogo learned from his experience in Burkina Faso is that prisons should not be considered as “forgotten” places but centres where detainees can be redressed so they can be reintegrated later in the society where they can be useful.

Hence, the importance of having well-trained prison officers, so that detainees are treated well. “They are human beings
who have the right to dignity, who deserve respect,” he insisted.

Beyond what it can do for him professionally, Mr. Ouedraogo believes that working with MINUSCA has been “a truly exhilarating experience” and he has learned a lot.

This includes learning to adjust linguistically and culturally in a country where French is one of the official languages, as it is in Burkina Faso.

“It happened to me several times in my interactions with those with whom I work that I cannot be understood well,” he explained. “Over time, I realized that an expression can mean something else depending of the place you come from,” he added.

“For example, when someone says ‘I am not hearing you well,’ it means here ‘I did not catch what you said.’ I used to understand it to mean that the person did not give me the attention I expected,” he said.