Durable ceasefire urgently needed as ‘humanitarian catastrophe’ leaves millions suffering in Yemen – UN relief chief

28 July - The conflict in Yemen has brought “appalling damage” on an already suffering people, the top United Nations humanitarian official told the Security Council today, pressing the international community to redouble its efforts to secure a pause in the fighting respected by all parties, thus providing space for relief workers to reach desperate civilians and for the warring sides to agree a durable ceasefire and, ultimately, a political solution.

“When I last reported on the situation…on 2nd June, I described Yemen as a looming humanitarian catastrophe. By every test, that catastrophe has now loomed, and loomed large. This is an intense disappointment given the extent of our efforts here at the UN and with partners to find ways of alleviating the suffering and the descent into catastrophe,” the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien, said.

He announced that he will travel to Yemen in the coming weeks to see first-hand the needs of the Yemeni people and the challenges faced in meeting these.

With 80 per cent of the population of about 26 million people in need of some kind of humanitarian assistance and more than 1,895 civilians killed by fighting since March, the impact of the conflict on civilians is indeed catastrophic, he acknowledged.

“Airstrikes hit a residential complex in Mokha on 24 July, killing at least 73 civilians. Bodies continue to be pulled out of the rubble, and the final death toll is not known.”

A humanitarian pause announced over the weekend has not been respected by any party to the conflict with airstrikes and...
ground fighting reported in eight governorates, Mr. O’Brien lamented, explain that since the nominal beginning of the unilateral pause announced by Saudi Arabia, coalition airstrikes had been confirmed, while ground fighting were also confirmed in a number of areas. Rockets were launched from Houthi/pro-Saleh-held areas of Lahj into neighbouring Aden, prompting return fire by Popular Committees, he added.

“We continue to witness the death and injury of civilians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. As of 24 July, health facilities report over 4,000 conflict-related deaths and over 19,800 injuries since 26 March. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reports that 1,895 civilians have been killed, and 4,182 injured.”

Since March, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Yemen has increased by 33 per cent from an already staggering 16 million people to more than 21 million in July. The number of those facing food insecurity has now increased from 10.6 to 13 million, an increase of 21 per cent.

“Some aid agencies are now using the term ‘starvation’ to describe the situation of those most food insecure. Conditions caused by the fighting have contributed to the spread of preventable diseases such as acute diarrhoea, dengue fever and polio. More than 15.2 million people lack access to basic healthcare, and more than 20 million lack access to safe water,” Mr. O’Brien added.

Commercial imports – which accounted for 90 per cent of Yemen’s food and fuel before the conflict – have decreased dramatically. A light, UN-led inspections mechanism enabling the flow of commercial imports to increase has long been proposed and is still urgently needed. Negotiations continue.

Humanitarian partners, with the expectation that the planned pause would take hold, had developed an operational plan to reach an additional 3 million people in the initial 5-day period with vital assistance, including three million people with water and sanitation, 600,000 people with life-saving healthcare, 3.1 million people with food and 2,200 children under five years old with treatment for acute malnutrition.

“That plan is live and ready to go now – if only we could get a pause to stick,” said Mr. O’Brien, who is also the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator. “We can go where we have access – there are no partial judgments involved.”

However, partners continue, “amazingly and bravely,” to deliver whenever and wherever possible, “often at great risk to themselves.” Yesterday, humanitarian agencies including the World Food Programme (WFP) dispatched food for 62,000 people, while 50,000 others continued to receive water after the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and its partners delivered fuel for the pumping station.

In Aden, he stressed, humanitarian partners have reopened health facilities that serve 360,000 people and began a vaccination campaign for 120,000 children. “Brilliant as this is, it is a mere fraction of what is needed, and what could and can be delivered, if the violence and fighting paused, preferably ceased”, underlined the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

“Recognizing the need to scale up operational presence, the UN is establishing five hubs across the country, and international UN staff began working in Al Hudaydah today, the first time that UN international staff have been based outside the capital since the start of the conflict.”

Finally, Mr. O’Brien reminded Council members that the humanitarian response is “woefully under-resourced”. The appeal for Yemen stands at $1.6 billion, of which only 15 per cent – $241 million – has so far been received, he explained. Much has already been spent by UN agencies and their partners advancing their own funds in expectations of the original Saudi pledge of $274 million being forthcoming.

“Additional resources are urgently needed – now,” he concluded.
UN agencies and partners warn of ‘acute shortage’ of meningitis vaccines

28 July - West Africa is at risk of a large meningitis outbreak unless drug manufacturers increase vaccine production by 5 million doses before the 2016 meningitis season starts in January, the United Nations and leading public health organizations warned today.

“We have had preliminary discussions with vaccine manufacturers and impressed upon them the need to produce a stockpile of 5 million doses of vaccine so as to be ready for flare-ups of the disease next year in Africa, but so far they haven’t yet revised their production plans to meet demand,” said Dr. Imran Mirza, a health specialist with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

The World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) issued a joint press release warning that “an acute shortage of meningitis C-containing vaccine threatens to severely limit the world’s ability to minimize the number of people affected.”

The four organizations, which make up the International Coordinating Group for Vaccine Provision for Epidemic Meningitis Control, said while substantial progress has been made in recent years in protecting Africa from other main sub-types of meningitis, “much work needs to be done to protect the African meningitis belt from meningitis C outbreaks.”

According to WHO, meningococcal meningitis is a bacterial form of meningitis, a serious infection of the thin lining that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. It can cause severe brain damage and is fatal in 50 per cent of cases if untreated. Several different bacteria can cause meningitis. Geographic distribution and epidemic potential differ according to the sub-types.

Dr. William Perea, WHO’s Coordinator for Control of Epidemic Diseases Unit, said “meningitis tends to hit Africa in cycles. Cases of meningitis C have been rising since 2013, first in Nigeria in 2013 and 2014, and then in Niger in 2015.”

“We have to be ready for a much larger number of cases during the 2016 meningitis season,” Dr. Perea said.

The four organizations stressed that vaccination remains key to preventing meningitis.

Middle East’s largest camp turns three as Syrian refugees in region top four million – UN agency

28 July - Living conditions for more than half a million refugees living in Jordan is becoming increasingly tough, the United Nations refugee agency warned today on the eve of the third anniversary of the establishment of Za’atari camp, which has grown into the largest refugee camp in the Middle East.

“Lines of tents that housed the first refugees to arrive in Za’atari have now been replaced by prefabricated shelters,” the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a press release, but “more than half the population are children, presenting challenges not just on how to provide schooling and restore abruptly halted educations in Syria, but also in investing for the future.”

One in every three children is not attending school, and there are also some 9,500 young people in the camp between the ages of 19-24 who need skills training and, like their older counterparts, also need livelihood opportunities.
“More opportunities must be found for this generation, and the millions of other refugees around the region in similar predicaments,” said agency spokesperson Ariane Rummery. “They are the future of Syria.”

Za’atari camp is the largest refugee camp in the Middle East, with around 81,000 Syrian residents. The temporary settlement was established on 29 July 2012 amid huge inflows of refugees from Syria and the camp was set up in nine days.

As the camp marks its third anniversary tomorrow, UNHCR said that living conditions for more than 500,000 refugees living outside of camps in Jordan had become increasingly tough, with the latest survey showing 86 per cent of urban refugees live below the Jordanian poverty line of some $95 per capita per month.

According to UNHCR, those living in Amman, Jordan, in particular, are trying to survive in one of the most expensive cities in the Middle East.

The agency spokesperson also noted that “with Za’atari at capacity, the number of urban refugees seeking shelter in Jordan’s second camp, Azraq, increased fourfold in the first six months of this year.”

This trend is driven by increasing vulnerability of urban refugees in Jordan whose savings are depleted after years in exile, and who are unable to find secure legal livelihoods, UNHCR reported. Most have already seen the value of their monthly World Food Programme (WFP) food vouchers being cut in recent months and now face the prospect of losing them entirely from next month.

In all, more than 4,015,000 refugees are registered in the region neighbouring Syria, including some 629,000 in Jordan.

**Violent attacks reported against civilians fleeing ISIL-controlled areas of Iraq – UN human rights office**

28 July - An increasing number of people in Iraq, including families with children and the elderly, have encountered deadly ambushes as they try to escape areas controlled the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) by risking their lives on a treacherous mountain journey to safety, the United Nations human rights office reported today.

“We have received reports that suggest a violent clampdown on people who are attempting to flee ISIL-controlled areas in Iraq, particularly through the Hamrin mountain chain in northeast Iraq” and onto Tikrit, Al-Alam and Kirkuk, said spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Ms. Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva, Switzerland, that an increasing number of people have been attempting to escape, taking a very difficult journey, and at least four families, including children and elderly people, reportedly died earlier this month after attempting the journey without a guide and with few supplies.

According to sources, the journey takes eight to 12 hours in very hot weather through uninhabited areas without signage or paved roads, she said.

“ISIL gunmen have also begun to set ambushes for people fleeing and ISIL snipers have reportedly attacked and killed those caught,” according to the OHCHR. “In one incident, three taxi drivers were reportedly executed between 10 and 12 July in Shirqat, purportedly for assisting residents in making the passage through Hamrin.”

There are also reports that many other families were abducted by ISIL en route to Tikrit and Al-Alam, it said.

“Any intentional direct attack against civilians is considered a serious violation of international humanitarian law,” the human rights spokesperson said. “All parties must ensure that civilians are protected, that they have unhindered access to medical facilities and humanitarian assistance, and that they are able to leave areas affected by violence – safely and with dignity.”
Ms. Shamdasani also said “ISIL continues to viciously target those perceived to be opposed to its ideology and rule, with despicable violence.”

On 20 July, for example, ISIL reportedly publicly killed an Imam in western Mosul following a decision by a self-appointed so-called court, allegedly for having criticised ISIL, and earlier this month four other Imams were allegedly executed for performing tarweed prayers, which are not authorized by ISIL.

Furthermore, on 10 July, ISIL reportedly killed nine people in central Mosul by running a bulldozer over them for allegedly provided information and collaborating with the Iraqi Security Forces and Peshmerga. There have also been an increasing number of civilian casualties across the country due to car bombs and gun attacks are also occurring with frequency, according to the OHCHR.

**Syria’s grim statistics ‘speak for themselves,’ reflect need for political settlement, Security Council told**

28 July - A political solution is more urgent than ever to end the “futile, hopeless” cycle of brutality and violence in Syria, the top United Nations humanitarian official said today, urging the Security Council to consider its options through “the eyes of the beleaguered, now long-suffering” civilians.

“There are no humanitarian solutions to this crisis. Each day that passes without the parties upholding their most basic obligations to protect civilians, and the strong demands of this Council, only results in more lives lost; more people displaced; more people without access to basic services; and a generation of children who struggle to obtain an education or have any sense of a future for themselves,” declared Stephen O’Brien, the UN Under-Secretary General for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Addressing the Council for the first time since taking up his post, he said it was “with much regret” that its inaugural statement continues where his predecessor had left off, chronicling yet another month of “grim statistics” to convey the “horrors” of a brutal conflict.

Urging donors and others to step up their financial support to the humanitarian effort in Syria, Mr. O’Brien, who is also the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, assured the Council that, until there is a political settlement, humanitarian needs will only grow. Currently, the response plan for Syria is only 27 per cent funded.

“In advance of my proposed visit to Damascus next month, I can only report on the verified facts – but the facts speak for themselves,” he stated.

This latest report is “no different” and comes, depressingly, as no surprise, highlighting how much worse the situation has become for so many civilians across Syria, the Under-Secretary General acknowledged, stressing that 12.2 million Syrians now are in need of humanitarian assistance today. It is estimated that some 220,000 people have been killed in Syria since the start of the conflict.

“In the face of such violent, indiscriminate onslaughts, it is simply not difficult for each one of us to feel what that must be like for the Syrian people, community by community; it is…the worst of all choices – either flee or be killed.”

Over the last several weeks, the Government of Syria and allied forces have pressed their attack on Zabadani in rural Damascus, leading to an unprecedented level of destruction and death among civilians, said Mr. O’Brien. At the same time, he added, non-State armed groups have threatened to overrun two Government-held villages near Idlib city, Kefraya and Fouah. He said he remains “extremely concerned” about the 15,000 civilians caught in the middle of fighting in these areas.

Intense fighting across the country has also caused a surge in displacement, he said, noting that well over 100,000 people fled the southern areas of Al-Hasakeh city following Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)’s advances last month. In Ar-Raqqa Governorate, over 70,000 people had to flee as fighting escalated between ISIL and non-State armed groups, and
in southern Syria, over 40,000 people fled Dar’a city following an offensive by non-State armed groups launched on the city.

“Altogether, over one million people have been displaced from their homes in 2015 so far, many for the second or third time; this adding to the 7.6 million people already internally displaced as of the end of 2014.”

Another “tragic milestone” was recorded when the number of registered refugees reached four million in early July, which makes it “the largest refugee population from a single conflict worldwide in over a quarter of a century.”

Overall, water availability has been reduced by half around the country since the start of the conflict, resulting in a significant increase in water-borne diseases during the hot summer months, with thousands of cases of acute diarrhoea, Hepatitis A and typhoid reported.

More broadly, the relentless conflict in Syria is gradually destroying the country’s social and economic fabric, eroding the development gains made over several generations: 80 per cent of people living in poverty; rampant food insecurity amid rising prices; degradation of vital infrastructure and limited access to basic services; and families and community networks destroyed.

A child born in 2011, entering school this year, will only know war. With the bombing of schools and the fear of young people, this is producing a completely lost generation of educated Syrians, which bodes ill for the future we all hope Syria will one day start rebuilding.

“With unimpeded access, imagine how many more millions could be reached. But access is severely restricted,” Mr. O’Brien told the Council, citing widespread fighting, shifting conflict lines, and intentional obstacles put in place by all parties.

Finally, he said, some 4.6 million people, “around a quarter of the country’s population,” live in areas that remain extremely hard to reach for humanitarian actors, and some 422,000 people are in areas that remain besieged by the parties.

Some progress was made when the Syrian Government approved an additional number of inter-agency convoys in June, noted the Under Secretary-General. “However, 45 convoy requests, including 33 made on 1 July, remain pending and I call upon the Government of Syria to positively consider and grant these requests.”

He hoped that his proposed visit to Damascus next month will provide an opportunity to constructively engage with the authorities to address some of the significant access challenges that seriously impede humanitarian operations and prevent ordinary Syrians from getting the assistance “they so desperately need.”

Security Council condemns Boko Haram violence, backs regional efforts to counter ongoing attacks

28 July - While acknowledging progress made against Boko Haram following joint regional military efforts in recent months, the United Nations Security Council today encouraged increased regional cooperation to stamp out the terrorist group, which the Council strongly condemned for its ongoing deadly violence, human rights abuses and mass abductions in the Lake Chad Basin.

Adopting a Presidential Statement during a formal meeting, the Security Council expressed its concern at the continued threat posed to international peace and security by Boko Haram “and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida,” and reaffirmed Member States’ determination to continue doing all “they can to resolve conflict and to deny terrorist groups the ability to put down roots and establish safe havens.”

The Council went on to reiterate its strong condemnation of all the terrorist attacks, abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin region, and recognized that women and girls are
particularly targeted by Boko Haram. Council members expressed deep sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims as well as to the peoples and Governments of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad and wishes a speedy recovery to those injured.

Acknowledging a series of steps taken by the African Union (AU), the Security Council in its statement took note of the letter sent to the UN Secretary-General on 6 March 2015, forwarding the Communiques adopted by the AU Peace and Security Council on 29 January and 3 March 2015, as well as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) Strategic Concept of Operations (CONOPS) to fight against Boko Haram.

In this regard, the Council commended the Lake Chad Basin Member States and Benin for their continued efforts to fully operationalize the MNJTF in order to collectively enhance regional military cooperation and coordination to more effectively combat the threat posed by the Boko Haram.

The Council also encouraged the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in coordination with the AU Commission, to accelerate joint efforts to adopt a comprehensive strategy to more effectively and urgently combat the threat posed by Boko Haram, and, in this regard welcomes plans to convene a summit in August and urges the two subregional organizations to adopt a common strategy and develop active cooperation and coordination.

Acknowledging the economic burden borne by the Boko Haram-affected countries and welcoming the continuing commitment of Member States and international partners participating in support of the MNJTF, the Council called upon the international community and donors to support the Force, particularly its operational capability and welcomes in this regard, the AUC plans to organize a donors' conference in support of the efforts of the Lake Chad Basin Member States and Benin.

The Council statement also spotlights the “deteriorating humanitarian situation” in the Lake Chad Basin countries, with close to 1.9 million people forcibly displaced in the region. It reaffirmed the need for all parties to armed conflict to respect the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in order to ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance, and encouraged all actors involved in the response to support recovery programmes and, among others, to pay particular attention to the release and reintegration of children abducted by Boko Haram or formerly associated with this terrorist group.

UN human rights officials seriously concerned by verdicts in trial of former members of Qadhafi regime

28 July - The verdicts in the trial of 37 Qadhafi regime officials, including against the former leader’s son, Saif al-Islam Qadhafi, handed down today by the Tripoli Court of Assize, has drawn serious concern from senior United Nations human rights officials in Libya, as well as in Geneva, amid fears the trial did not meet international standards on a number of fronts.

“Concerns over the trial include the fact that several defendants were absent for a number of sessions. The evidence of criminal conduct was largely attributed to the defendants in general, with little effort to establish individual criminal responsibility,” said Claudio Cordone, Director of the Human Rights, Transitional Justice and Rule of Law Division of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

The court also announced today that Saif al-Islam Qadhafi, son of Muammar Qadhafi, and six others had been tried in absentia. Qadhafi, former intelligence chief Abdullah al-Senussi, Qadhafi’s last Prime Minister al-Baghdadi al-Mahmudi and six other defendants were sentenced to death by firing squad, points out a press release issued by UNSMIL.

Mr. Qadhafi – the first defendant on the list of 37 – was connected by videolink from Zintan, where he is jailed, only to four of the 24 sessions. Libya has not complied with the International Criminal Court order to surrender him.

The defendants were charged with a wide range of offences relating to the attempted suppression of the 2011 revolution.
Eight others officials of the fallen regime received sentences of life imprisonment, and the remainders of those convicted received sentences to between 12 and five years. Four defendants were acquitted of all charges.

“The prosecution did not present any witnesses or documents in court, confining itself entirely to the written evidence available in the case file, thus missing a historic opportunity to construct a public record of crimes committed by the former regime – a key step in Libya's transitional justice process”, regretted Mr. Cordone.

During their pre-trial detention, he added, defendants were denied access to lawyers and family for prolonged periods, and some reported that they were beaten or otherwise ill-treated, but UNSMIL is not aware of any investigation into these allegations.

Defence lawyers said they faced challenges in meeting their clients privately or accessing the full case file, some saying they received threats and that witnesses were reluctant to appear in court due to fears about their safety. The court did not respond to defence counsel requests to examine prosecution witnesses.

“Given these shortcomings, it is particularly worrisome that the court has handed down nine death sentences,” Mr. Cordone said. “International standards require that death sentences may only be imposed after proceedings that meet the highest level of respect for fair trial standards. The United Nations opposes the imposition of the death penalty as a matter of principle.”

Moreover, the next step in the judicial process is only cassation – a review of the application of Libyan law, not of questions of fact – rather than a proper appeal as required by international standards. “UNSMIL had previously urged the Libyan authorities to reform their national legislation introducing the possibility of an appeal for verdicts of the Court of Assize, in line with their obligations under international human rights law,” Mr. Cordoned reminded.

UNSMIL, he stated, will review the verdict once published in full over the coming period before completing its full assessment of the trial.

Many of these concerns were echoed in Geneva by Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who told reporters that her Office (OHCHR) is “deeply disturbed” at the verdicts and sentences handed down today.

“We had closely monitored the detention and trial and found that international fair trial standards had failed to be met. Among the key shortcomings is the failure to establish individual criminal responsibility in relation to specific crimes,” she said, adding that there were also serious issues relating to access to lawyers, claims of ill-treatment, and trials conducted in absentia.

Ms. Shamdasani stressed that while it is crucial to ensure accountability for serious human rights violations, “this needs to be done with scrupulous adherence to international fair trial standards and with full respect for the rights of the defendants. Failing this, injustice is only compounded.”

“The UN opposes the use of the death penalty in all circumstances. In this case, where fair trial standards have clearly not been met, we strongly deplore the imposition of the death penalty,” she said, urging that Libyan authorities to ensure that legal reforms are introduced as a matter of urgency, to ensure that human rights are fully respected in the administration of justice and that verdicts of the Court of Assize can be appealed and are not only subject to cassation.
Dominican Republic: UN experts warn against deportations, racial profiling of people of Haitian descent

28 July - United Nations human rights experts today called on the Government of the Dominican Republic to take steps to prevent arbitrary deportations and to adopt measures to address allegations of racial profiling during deportations of people of Haitian descent.

“No one should be deported when there are legal and valid reasons to stay,” human rights expert Mireille Fanon Mendes-France, who currently heads the UN Working Group of Experts of People of African Descent, said in a news release.

“Migrants are entitled to protection and Dominicans of Haitian descent have the right to reside safely in the territory, as well as children born in the Dominican Republic who are legally registered,” she stated.

Some 19,000 people have reportedly left Dominican Republic for Haiti since 21 June due to fear and amidst concerns that there will be violations when deportations officially start in August.

“The Dominican Republic cannot violate international norms or those of the inter-American system of human rights protection, and especially not violate its own Constitution,” the expert emphasized.

According to the expert panel, the difficulties in obtaining necessary documents to register for the naturalization and regularization process, the lack of information on the deportation plan, and the deportations “have instilled fear, resulting in a situation whereby people of Haitian descent without documents are also leaving to avoid abrupt deportations.”

The Working Group today reiterated its call on the Dominican authorities to put in place effective and transparent legislation and other measures to successfully fight the discrimination and social exclusion faced mostly by Haitian migrants and people of Haitian descent in the country.

“The Dominican Republic does not recognize the existence of a structural problem of racism and xenophobia, but it must address these issues as a matter of priority so the country can live free from tension and fear,” Ms. Mendes-France added.

The Working Groups are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world.

Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.
'Prevent hepatitis; Act now,' declares UN on World Day targeting hepatitis B and C

28 July - Marking World Hepatitis Day 2015, which falls on 28 July in honour of the birthday of the scientist who discovered the hepatitis B virus and its first vaccine, the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners are urging policymakers, health workers and the public to act now to prevent infection and death from the infectious disease.

The theme for this year's Day Prevent Hepatitis: Act Now focuses on hepatitis B and C, which together cause approximately 80 per cent of all liver cancer deaths and kill close to 1.4 million people every year.

WHO has announced a new Global Injection Safety Initiative in three pilot countries -- Egypt, Uganda and India – to combat what the UN health agency calls the “silent epidemic.”

And this year, WHO's flagship event takes place in Egypt, a country that has one of the world's highest hepatitis burdens.

Meanwhile, the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Yury Fedotov, said hepatitis is preventable and “some forms are curable.”

“Despite this truth, the disease continues to spread and is responsible for the deaths and suffering of millions around the world,” Mr. Fedotov said in a statement on the Day that some 6.3 million people, or every second person who injects drugs, are living with hepatitis C.

“At World Hepatitis Day, UNODC stresses that it will continue to work closely with its partners, including civil society, to do everything possible to prevent the spread of hepatitis C among people who use drugs and those living in prisons,” he said.

According to WHO, viral hepatitis – a group of infectious diseases known as hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E – affects hundreds of millions of people worldwide, causing acute and chronic liver disease and killing close to 1.5 million people every year, mostly from hepatitis B and C. These infections can be prevented, but most people don't know how.

Key messages of World Hepatitis Day 2015, include:

Prevent hepatitis – know the risks

Unsafe blood, unsafe injections, and sharing drug-injection equipment can all result in hepatitis infection.

Prevent hepatitis – demand safe injections

Two million people a year contract hepatitis from unsafe injections. Using sterile, single-use syringes can prevent these infections.

Prevent hepatitis – vaccinate children

Approximately 780,000 persons die each year from hepatitis B infection. A safe and effective vaccine can protect from hepatitis B infection for life.

Prevent hepatitis – get tested, seek treatment
Effective medicines exist to treat hepatitis B and cure hepatitis C.

The date of 28 July was chosen for World Hepatitis Day in honour of the birthday of Nobel Laureate Professor Baruch Samuel Blumberg, discoverer of the hepatitis B virus and developer of the first hepatitis B vaccine.

**Security Council authorizes ongoing African Union deployment in Somalia, extends UN assistance mission**

28 July - The Security Council today authorized the Member States of the African Union to maintain the deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) for an additional 10 months, until 30 May 2016.

By the unanimously adopted text, the Council followed the Secretary-General’s recommendation that conditions would not be appropriate for a United Nations peacekeeping operation in the country until the end of 2016, at the earliest.

The Council also extended the mandate of the UN Special Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) until 30 March 2016, underlining the importance that both AMISOM and UNSOM strengthen their relationship to ensure support for the country’s political process.

Authorizing the deployment of up to 22,126 uniformed personnel for AMISOM, the Council requested a “structured and targeted” reconfiguration of the Mission to enable a surge in its efficiency. And by 30 October 2015, the African Union should have developed, in close collaboration with the United Nations, a “new concept of operations” for the Mission, the Council requested.

Underscoring the importance of UNSOM’s support to the political process in Somalia, in particular the preparation of the electoral process in 2016, the Security Council requested from the Mission that it strengthens its presence in all capitals of Interim Regional Administrations.

Deployment of civilian planning in regional capitals should also be a priority in order to improve joint planning between military and civilian components, says the resolution adopted today.

On the national security front, the Council welcomed the adoption of the Guulwade (Victory) Plan by the Federal Government of Somalia, a “critical step” towards developing a more effective national army, nonetheless stressing the importance of accelerating improved coordination of Somali security institutions.

While it welcomed the Government’s commitment to an “inclusive and credible” electoral process in 2016, the Security Council also expressed concern at continued human rights violations in Somalia, underscoring the need to end impunity for such crimes.