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ICC Prosecutor says determination to bring justice to people of Sudan remains ‘unshaken’

29 June - Over six years since the issuance of the first warrant of arrest against Sudan’s President Omar al-Bashir, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) today said that her Office’s determination to bring “independent and impartial justice” to the people of Sudan remains “unshaken”.

“The question we need to ask of ourselves today is whether the people of Darfur, who continue to endure the suffering widely recognized by, amongst others, the African Union (AU), will ever receive the justice they deserve? Will their plight be finally answered through independent and impartial justice, or will their cries continue to face silent inaction?”

Ms. Bensouda’s comments led off her briefing to the Security Council and come amid a worsening security climate and dire humanitarian crisis in the western Sudanese region, with ramped-up hostilities between Government forces and armed movements, deadly inter-communal conflicts and a precipitous rise in criminality and banditry.

This morning, the Security Council decided to extend the African Union-UN Hybrid Operation (UNAMID) mandate for an additional year.

Dismissing “those who have chosen to deliberately distort facts by alleging that the ICC imposed itself on Sudan,” Ms.
Bensouda said that efforts of “detractors and naysayers” only serve to strengthen her Office’s resolve.

“Omar Bashir’s rapid departure from South Africa proves that the warrants of arrest against him are as valid as they were when issued; that they remain in full force and effect, and that my Office is committed to ensure they are executed”, she went on to say.

While the Sudanese President may have escaped the law in South Africa through an unanticipated and premature departure from the 24th AU Summit, “the swift judicial action by South African courts we have witnessed is a shining precedent that must be emulated in other States,” the Prosecutor continued.

“More generally, the High Court’s ruling in South Africa has also underlined a growing recognition by domestic courts of states' obligations to uphold their commitments under international law - in this case, the ICC’s Rome Statute.”

It is “past time” for the Security Council and UN Member States to join forces with the Court and civil society in devising concrete and effective strategies for the arrest of accused persons wanted by the Court, and to give the ICC the full support it requires, Ms. Bensouda stressed.

“I encourage States Parties to plan – ahead – for the arrest of each individual wanted by the Court in a targeted and efficient manner.”

Reminding the Council of the “frequency” and “brutality” of the targeting of civilians, women in particular, the Prosecutor claimed that the people alleged to be most responsible for these ongoing atrocities are “the same people against who warrants of arrest have already been issued.”

She repeated to the Council what she said during her last briefing about the situation in Darfur in December 2014: that her Office has finite resources and a heavy caseload, and is therefore struggling to commit to full, active investigations of the on-going crimes in Darfur.

“This however, should not in any-way be misconstrued or interpreted to mean that investigations have been closed or that we have abandoned the victims of mass atrocities in Darfur. Far from it”, she insisted.

The ICC Prosecutor called “once again” on the Council to ensure Sudan's compliance with its resolution 1593, as well as on States Parties to the Rome Statute to promote cooperation and affect the arrest of individuals wanted by the Court in the Darfur situation.

“If there is no follow-up action on the part of the Security Council, any referral by the Council to the ICC…would never achieve its ultimate goal, namely, to put an end to impunity. Accordingly, any such referral would become futile.”

“There is more that we can and must all do to achieve peace and justice in Darfur. It must be stressed that this Council also has a vital role to play and must do its part.”
‘We the Peoples’ exhibit of iconic artwork by Norman Rockwell set to open at UN Headquarters

29 June - Part of the ongoing series of events to mark the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, a special exhibition is set to open at the world body’s New York Headquarters bringing together legendary artist Norman Rockwell’s original United Nations drawing, his Golden Rule painting, and a collection of work that reflects his appreciation for humanity and the noble goals of the Organization.

The exhibition, We The Peoples: Norman Rockwell’s United Nations, opening Monday 29 June, runs through 15 September, and is being presented by the Norman Rockwell Museum, located in in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in partnership with the United Nations Foundation and the UN Department of Public Information.

It features 33 original artworks by the iconic American painter and illustrator, including United Nations, a massive, complex charcoal drawing made in 1953 that portrays members of the Security Council and 65 people representing the nations of the world, and Golden Rule, a painting Rockwell made in 1961 where he celebrated the peoples of the world.

While a mosaic based on Golden Rule has been on display at the UN since 1985 – offered as a 40th anniversary gift on behalf of the United States by then First Lady Nancy Reagan – the drawing and the painting were never exhibited before outside their home at the Norman Rockwell Museum. They will be on display along with sketches, colour studies and notes for both artworks.

In an interview ahead of the opening of the exhibition, Mr. Eliasson spoke with the UN News Centre, and praised Golden Rule, as “one of the most unique pieces that you can see.” He said the beauty of the painting is the closeness of the people “listening to the discussion, and you can see in their faces their worries, their concerns, their aspirations, their dreams – each face expresses what you hope this Organization can produce: peace, development, human rights.”

Also included in the exhibition are a colourful series of travel paintings and some iconic images of the civil rights area that reflect Rockwell’s idealism and hopeful outlook for the future.

During the opening ceremony, remarks will be made by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Deputy Secretary-General Ian Eliasson; Kathy Calvin, President and CEO of the United Nations Foundation; and Laurie Norton Moffatt, Director and CEO of the Norman Rockwell Museum.

Yemen: Ban deplores attack on UN compound in Gulf country, calls for full investigation

29 June - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned the Coalition-led airstrikes on a United Nations compound in the Yemeni city of Aden, which resulted in serious structural damage and one casualty, a spokesperson for the Organization said today.

In a statement issued this afternoon, the UN spokesperson relayed the Secretary-General’s call for a full investigation into the incident and for those responsible to be held to account.

“International humanitarian law requires protection by all parties of civilians and civilian facilities, including UN staff and UN premises. The inviolability of UN premises and the important work of all United Nations staff must be respected at all times,” the statement confirmed. “Ensuring accountability is indispensable in preventing such incidents.”

As a result of the airstrikes conducted on 28 June by Coalition forces, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) office was severely damaged and a guard working for the Organization injured.
According to the statement, Mr. Ban “strongly believes” the incident only underscores the imperative that all the parties to the conflict must end the fighting and return to the negotiation table “as the only possible way to achieve a durable peace in Yemen.”

The Secretary-General’s appeal comes on the heels of last week’s Security Council press statement in which the members also “strongly condemned” all violence used to intimidate and interrupt Yemeni stakeholders participating in UN-brokered consultations aimed at finding a political solution to the crisis.

**Extending mandate of UN mission in Mali, Security Council adds observers to monitor fresh ceasefire**

29 June - The Security Council today extended the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) for one year, within the authorized troop ceiling of 11,240 military personnel, including, for the first time, at least 40 military observers to monitor and supervise the country’s newly agreed ceasefire.

Through a unanimously adopted resolution, the 15-member body extended MINUSMA’s mandate until 30 June 2016, and decided that it should perform tasks related to, among others, the monitoring and supervision of ceasefire arrangements; supporting the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali; protecting civilians under imminent threat of physical violence; and assisting the Malian authorities in their efforts to promote and protect human rights.

The Council welcomed the signing of the agreement over the past weeks by the Malian Government and the coalitions of armed groups that had remained outside the accord – the Plateforme, and the Coordination des Mouvements de l’Azawad, as “a historic opportunity” to achieve lasting peace in Mali. At the same time, the Council strongly condemned the violations of the ceasefire by the Malian parties, which had led to loss of life, including of civilians, and displacement and undermined the peace process.

Through the resolution, the Council urged the Government of Mali, the Plateforme and Coordination armed groups to fulfill their commitments under the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, and further urged all parties to immediately and fully respect and uphold the ceasefire agreement of 23 May 2014, the Arrangement sécuritaire pour une cessation des hostilités of 5 June 2015, and the declarations of cessation of hostilities of 19 February 2015 and 24 July 2014.

The Council further expressed its readiness to consider targeted sanctions against those who undermined the peace process, notably by resuming hostilities, violating the ceasefire, or taking actions to obstruct or threaten the implementation of the Agreement, as well as those who, among other things, attacked and took actions to threaten MINUSMA, international security presences or humanitarian personnel.

It demanded that all armed groups in Mali put aside their arms, cease hostilities, reject the recourse to violence, cut off all ties with terrorist organizations and recognize, without conditions, the unity and territorial integrity of the Malian State.

Further to the resolution, the Security Council expressed its concern at the slow pace of deployment of personnel and equipment of MINUSMA, which had seriously hindered the Mission’s ability to fully implement its mandate since its establishment on 25 April 2013. It nevertheless welcomed efforts by the Secretary-General to accelerate that deployment and to provide adequate training to improve the security and safety of MINUSMA’s personnel in a complex security environment.
INTERVIEW: Afghanistan must not be forgotten amid more pressing crises, warns UN envoy

29 June - The international community must not take its “eye off the ball” when it comes to Afghanistan, the top United Nations envoy there has warned, noting that the country faces numerous challenges that will take quite a bit of time to tackle.

Speaking to the UN News Centre, Mr. Haysom – the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) – said it would be “disastrous” if the country was forgotten amid today’s more pressing crises. Although there has been progress in meeting the country’s challenges in the economic, security and political fields, failure in any one of these areas would have consequences for the overall success of the Afghan transition.

UN News Centre: Is there a sense of hopelessness growing among the people, or are they very resilient?

Nicholas Haysom: Afghans are resilient. For 30 years they have been living in an unstable, insecure position. While they are resilient, there needs to be cause for hope. With hope, I think people can withstand quite difficult circumstances. So really, one is in the business of measuring, as it were, a ‘hope barometer,’ which looks at a wide range of factors including the state of the economy, the functioning of government and whether they think things are generally moving in the right direction.

UN News Centre: And where do you think we are on the ‘hope barometer’?

Nicholas Haysom: I think we’re quite evenly balanced. There is cause for concern, which the Afghans express. But on the other hand, things are more or less on track. I think it would be accurate to say that Afghanistan is muddling through. And I would also not undervalue that. It may sound as if I’m dropping the bar but the truth is that Afghanistan first has to address serious economic problems. It has to sustain its overall coherence in its security agencies and security response. It has to make progress politically, which, given tensions within Government and the challenges facing it, are quite significant.

While they are, more or less, meeting the benchmarks and may be modestly succeeding them, I think that everyone is aware that if something were to go badly wrong in any one of those areas – if the government was to fall apart for some reason, the economy was to dip badly or there was to be some serious security reverses – all of those would go into the mix.

There is not going to be any miraculous transformations to the economy, to the conflict that plagues the country or in the political achievements.

UN News Centre: Does the recent attack on Parliament and what we’ve been seeing in Kunduz show that the nature of the challenges facing Afghanistan is changing, evolving?

Nicholas Haysom: The nature of the challenge is evolving, but bear in mind that in 2015 the Afghan Security Forces have taken on the sole responsibility of managing the security of the country. Five years ago, some would say that was unthinkable. There are steady achievements… but we’ve always got to be realistic; the Afghans are realistic. We should not overstress enormous strides. There is not going to be any miraculous transformations to the economy, to the conflict that plagues the country or in the political achievements.

UN News Centre: Following the withdrawal of foreign troops, to what extent has the UN’s role become more difficult?

Nicholas Haysom: What we have seen is not simply a military withdrawal. We’ve also seen an international civilian withdrawal. There has undoubtedly been an economic contraction with more visible signs of poverty, even in Kabul itself. In the three years that I’ve been in Kabul, there has been a deterioration of security. The way in which we do our work is more circumscribed. We are now unable to make use of social networks in the way we used to, to engage not only Afghans but also the non-Afghan non-governmental organizations and diplomatic communities. The space for the engagement of
society has shrunk because of the deterioration of the security environment.

Politically, it has also been testing for the UN. We are working with a Government which has made it clear that it expects value from the UN. It is not prepared to accept the mandates of any given agency, fund or programme as a self-evident virtue. It wants to see what we bring to the table and how we are contributing towards growing the capacity of Afghans to manage their own affairs.

UN News Centre: The UN remains very committed to Afghanistan. What about the rest of the international community, are they losing interest? Is this becoming a forgotten crisis?

Nicholas Haysom: I look at it from two dimensions. Internally, there has been a reduction in size of the international community’s presence. You see that in regard to the media, in regard to the size, the number of diplomatic missions and maybe in the engagement of economic entities as well. One would hope that those remaining are more committed and engaged and that there is still a lot that can be done.

Externally, we would recognize that there are more pressing issues outside of Afghanistan. Those issues occur in places that are closer to Europe and the traditional European-NATO type countries that are heavily invested in Afghanistan.

On the one hand, Afghanistan needs to acknowledge that it is not the only case that has a compelling claim to international attention. But on the other, it needs to make the case that it would be disastrous, and lead to potential reversals if the international community would lose attention – take their eye off the ball, so to speak.

UN News Centre: How optimistic are you for Afghanistan as a whole?

Nicholas Haysom: Once you adjust to the hurdles you think the country must meet, to the level of realism, I am optimistic. As I said, there is not going to be any miracles, there is going to be gradual engagement with challenges it meets, against realistic benchmarks. And they have the potential to meet them.

'Journey towards bold climate action is at a critical moment,' UN General Assembly told

29 June - Development cannot be sustainable if it does not address the challenge of climate change, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told Member States today as he opened a High-Level Event on Climate Change convened in New York by the President of the UN General Assembly, Sam Kutesa.

“Let us always remember that climate change and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin, with two mutually reinforcing agendas,” the UN chief explained to delegations gathered for the event.

Just months ahead of the next Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which will take place in Paris, today's event has been convened in support to the process that will ultimately result in an agreement intended to succeed to the landmark Kyoto Protocol on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Among the participants, Academy Award-winning actor and long-time conservationist Robert Redford, and 15-year-old indigenous climate activist Xiuhetzcatl Roske-Martinez, are expected to join the broad call for action to energize multilateral cooperation on climate change. Raised in the Aztec tradition, Mr. Roske-Martinez is Youth Director of a non-profit organization called Earth Guardians.

Keynote speakers are expected to include, Anote Tong, President of Kiribati, Mogens Lykketoft, Speaker of the Parliament of Denmark and President-elect of the 70th session of the General Assembly, Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, Minister of the Environment of Peru, President of COP20, and Laurent Fabius, Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, President of COP21.
“Adoption of a transformative post-2015 development agenda in September, achieving a successful outcome from the upcoming Third International Conference on Financing for Development and concluding a global climate change agreement will be monumental milestones towards improving the livelihoods of people around the world,” Assembly President Kutesa summarized.

But a climate change agreement in Paris will not be the end point, observed the Secretary-General: “it must be a turning point in how the world collectively responds to the defining challenge of our time,” he stressed.

“Today, we have come together to take stock of what we have pledged, what we have delivered, and what else we must do to ensure that world leaders and their governments adopt an ambitious, universal agreement in December.”

Journey towards bold climate action is therefore at a “critical moment”, he stated.

The Secretary-General welcomed a number of recent achievements, such as the fact that the world’s three biggest economies – China, the European Union and the United States – have “placed their bets” on low-carbon, climate-resilient growth, while the two biggest emitters of greenhouse gases announced ambitious climate actions. And other major economies in the G7 and G20 made clear their intention to act, he rejoiced.

“Nevertheless, these pledges cover only a portion of total global emissions. We must seize today's opportunity to make a strong call to all Parties to submit their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCS), bearing in mind the urgent need for concrete actions by all,” advised the President of the General Assembly.

Another cause for satisfaction, pointed out the Secretary-General, is the dramatic fall in prices of renewable energy sources, which in some places has reached parity with fossil fuels. “The world is now using more renewable electric power each year than it is from coal, natural gas and oil put together,” Member States were told.

Moreover, he went on to say, investors and insurers are starting to integrate climate risk into their decision-making, while citizens, civil society and faith leaders, most recently Pope Francis, are pushing for action.

However, the pace of the UNFCCC negotiations is far too slow, said Mr. Ban, underscoring that the key political issues are still on the table. “With only ten negotiating days remaining before Paris, governments must accelerate their efforts.”

That recommendation was echoed by the President of the General Assembly, who emphasized how much negotiations launched earlier this month in Bonn must make “substantive progress.”

Highlighting what a “meaningful” agreement in Paris should include, the Secretary-General said that first, it “must” provide a strong signal to governments and markets that the world is committed to building a low-carbon future, “and that there is no going back.”

“Second, an agreement must be durable so that it provides the private sector with the predictability and policy frameworks it needs to invest in clean energy and climate-resilient approaches.”

Third, Mr. Ban continued, it must be flexible so that it can incentivize and incorporate more ambitious, “science-based nationally determined targets over time.” While urging countries that did not submit yet their INDCs to do so as soon as possible, he reminded delegations that these targets “will not be sufficient to place us on a less-than-2-degree pathway.”

“An agreement must therefore enable countries to regularly review progress towards this goal, and encourage more ambitious, nationally determined targets to meet it.”

Such agreement must also uphold the principle of equity, support the adaptation needs of developing countries, and demonstrate solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable countries through a focused package of assistance. Finally, “it must have clear mechanisms for measuring, monitoring and reporting progress on a full range of actions.”

Noting that credible climate financing is essential, the Secretary-General urged developed countries to provide a politically
credible trajectory for “mobilizing $100 billion per year by 2020” to support developing countries in curbing emissions and strengthening their resilience.

“It is also important to ensure that effective platforms for developing and sharing technologies and innovative research are enhanced”, added the Assembly President in his remarks. “Barriers” to the transfer of green technologies, including intellectual property protection issues, need to be urgently addressed, he said.

“I will proactively engage with leaders from both the global north and south to make sure this goal is met and is considered credible by all,” the Secretary-General assured. “I pledge to you that I will spare no effort to ensure that the world leaders who are responsible for an ambitious agreement in Paris – and the financing needed to implement it – are directly engaged.”

Echoing Mr. Ban's sense of urgency during a high-level panel held in the afternoon, Oscar-winner and renowned climate activist Robert Redford warned that for the international community “the time for half measures and climate denial is over.”

“We see the effects all around us – from drought and famine in Africa, and heat waves in South Asia, to wildfires across North America, devastating hurricanes and crippling floods here in New York,” the actor told those gathered. “We must be a movement that includes every single nation on Earth, because climate change affects every nation on Earth.”

He added: “Only by acting now and standing together behind a universal climate agreement can we live up to the UN's founding promise. Only by acting now and standing together can we achieve the results we need in the time we have left. Only by acting now and standing together can we tip the scales and change the course of history.”

**Syria: deputy UN relief chief urges political solution amid 'extremely challenging' humanitarian crisis**

*29 June* - Humanitarian access to civilians trapped by the Syrian conflict is being increasingly obstructed by the ongoing fighting in the country and a shortfall in critical funding, a senior United Nations relief official warned today.

Delivering remarks at the Security Council's briefing on Syria, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Kyung-Wha Kang, told delegates that despite the international community's efforts to find a political solution to the hostilities, violence continues with “utter impunity” leading to a spiralling deterioration of the crisis.

“Over the past month, this violence, which is perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, has neither abated nor diminished in brutality,” Ms. Kang observed. “The parties…continue to violate human rights and international humanitarian law with impunity – killing and torturing civilians, blocking humanitarian access, destroying and besieging communities.”

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the situation in Syria is increasingly dire as critical relief efforts stutter, impeded by the fighting, shifting frontlines and the rise of extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Jabhat Al-Nusra, and Jaysh Al-Islam.

In its latest situation report, OCHA warned that some 12 million people in the Middle Eastern country today remain in need of humanitarian assistance – a 12-fold increase since 2011. The figures include 5.6 million children. Meanwhile, 7.6 million people have been displaced by the conflict and over 4 million have fled across borders.

The humanitarian impact of the crisis is only further compounded by the grim human toll which, as of today, counts over 220,000 people killed and over one million injured since hostilities began.

Despite the “extremely challenging environment,” Ms. Kang continued, humanitarian organizations operating within Syria and from neighbouring countries are continuing to reach millions of people in need.

However, she added, due to depleted funds, food assistance across the region is now in jeopardy and the tenuous situation
inside the country has made access to the 4.8 million people in hard to reach and besieged locations “a serious challenge.”

“Given the fluid and dynamic nature of the conflict in Syria, it is crucial for UN agencies to be able to use any and every route, across borders and conflict lines, to reach those who require assistance,” said the UN official. “But these efforts require adequate resources. Only a quarter of the appeal for live saving work in Syria and the region is funded today.”

The humanitarian challenges facing the UN and other aid agencies are further impaired by the regular and indiscriminate use of barrel bombs by Government forces as well as attacks on medical facilities and the continued use of explosive weapons in populated towns and cities.

“For the people of Syria and humanitarians who assist them, it is hard to see an end to this nightmare of violence and destruction,” Ms. Kang concluded. “We look to the leadership of this Council to press for a political solution.”

UNESCO unveils global campaign to counter deliberate destruction of cultural heritage

29 June - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) today launched the Global Coalition Unite for Heritage campaign, which aims to strengthen the mobilization of governments and all heritage stakeholders in the face of deliberate damage to cultural heritage, particularly in the Middle East.

“The threat is global and our response must be global. It requires better coordination among national services, the exchange of information among States. Nothing can replace, in this area, the action of governments,” said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova as she launched the initiative in Bonn, Germany, where the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee is underway.

“Our main challenge is to succeed in getting all the players involved in this struggle to work together: police, customs officials, museums, governments, actors from the cultural, humanitarian and security sectors, civil society and the media. We need to create new alliances to meet the challenges of violent extremism,” the Director-General said.

During the morning, the World Heritage Committee adopted the Bonn Declaration on World Heritage which condemns “the barbaric assaults, violence and crimes committed in recent times by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Da’esh, against the cultural heritage of Iraq, including the World Heritage site at Hatra, which recalls mindless destructions in Bamiyan, Timbuktu and elsewhere.”

The Committee also expressed deep concern for other sites such as Palmyra, in Syria, or the Old Town of Sana’a, in Yemen. The Declaration recommends that heritage protection be included in the mandate of peacekeeping missions where appropriate. It also calls on UNESCO to enhance its international leadership in coordinating the response to the protection of heritage in the event of armed conflict or natural disaster.

The Global Coalition Unite for Heritage aims to mobilize players beyond the cultural and heritage communities and seeks to sensitize the general public and young people in particular to culture’s unifying force. It expands on UNESCO’s efforts to coordinate technical work among different specialized agencies and institutions, and on the social media campaign to mobilize young people and civil society at large.

During a visit to Baghdad in March this year, Ms. Bokova launched the social media campaign #Unite4Heritage. UNESCO also brought together all the heads of organizations involved in the fight against illicit trafficking to speed up the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2199, which bans the trade in cultural objects from Syria and Iraq.
New UNESCO report finds some $2.3 billion required to send children to school in war-torn countries

29 June - It will cost $2.3 billion to send to school the 34 million children and adolescents of conflict-affected countries who are currently not attending educational institutions, which is 10 times the amount being received from humanitarian aid now, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said in a new report released today.

“Present targets are hugely insufficient and diverting attention from the true needs of children and youth on the ground,” said Aaron Benavot, Director of UNESCO’s Education For All Global Monitoring Report (EFAFM).

For primary education, Mr. Benavot said, an extra $38 is needed per child in conflict situations, and $113 is needed per adolescent in lower secondary education.

“Surely we can find these funds,” he said. “Most of us carry the cost for one child in our pocket.”

According to the report, 34 million children and adolescents are out of school in conflict-affected countries.

“The most vulnerable are the hardest hit: the poorest are twice as likely to be out of school as their counterparts in peaceful countries,” UNESCO said in a press release on the launch of the 2015 report. “The paper shows that $2.3 billion is required to place them in school – 10 times the amount that education is receiving from humanitarian aid right now.” In 2014, education received only 2 per cent of humanitarian aid.

UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova said: “Returning to school may be the only flicker of hope and normality for many children and youth in countries engulfed in crises.”

“The Incheon Declaration adopted [in May at the World Education Forum in Incheon, Republic of Korea] by 160 countries commits to meeting the needs of these populations through more resilient, resistive and inclusive education systems and a response to crisis that spans the phases of emergency, recovery and building,” Ms. Bokova said. “Education must be seen as part of the first response when crisis hits and an integral part of any peacebuilding strategy.”

According to UNESCO, the the 2014 paper shows that only a third of countries had reached global education goals set in 2000, and identified conflict as one of the major barriers to achieving better results. Today's paper shows the extent of the challenges that conflict presents.

“Children in conflict-affected countries are more than twice as likely, and adolescents two-thirds more likely, to be out of school than in non-conflict affected countries,” it said, adding that “young women are almost 90 per cent more likely to be out of secondary school in conflict affected-countries than elsewhere.”

The report also said that media attention unfairly prioritizes some countries over others: more than half of available humanitarian aid to education was allocated to just 15 out of 342 appeals between 2000 and 2014.

It proposes a new, evidence-based finance target, and makes recommendations for tightening the current aid structure for education in crises.

“Any new global emergency education fund should ensure that resources for education in crises are additional, flexible and predictable,” the report said.

Developed by an independent team and published by UNESCO, the agency says thee Education for All Global Monitoring Report is an authoritative reference that aims to inform, influence and sustain genuine commitment towards Education for All.
As World Heritage Committee opens session, UNESCO urges protection of sites targeted for destruction

28 June - The head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) strongly appealed for the international community to help counter the emerging threat of violent extremism and cultural cleansing, in remarks to the opening of the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee today in Bonn, Germany.

"Heritage is under attack today. In Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, we see the brutal and deliberate destruction of heritage on an unprecedented scale. This is a call for action," said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, as she addressed participants at the Committee's current session, which runs through 8 July.

"Our response to ignorance and criminal stupidity, must also have a cultural dimension: knowledge, the sharing of Islam's millennial learning and wisdom, sharing the message of Palmyra, the 'Venice of the Sands', that is like a bridge between the legacies of ancient Greece and Rome, the Persian Empire and the Arab culture from ancient times to the present," declared Mrs. Bokova.

Committee Chair, Maria Böhmer, Minister of State at the German Federal Foreign Office and member of the Bundestag, said the fury of terrorist organizations like ISIS [also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levans, or ISIL] in Iraq surpasses the imagination.

"World Heritage is the foundation of people's existence and cohesion [...]. It is the wellspring of social identity," she added, invoking the role of culture in peacebuilding.

During the opening session, the International Young Experts Forum presented the outcome of their meeting, taking place from 18 to 29 June in Koblenz and Bonn. They read out the Declaration they adopted calling on States Parties to the World Heritage Convention to include teaching about World Heritage in national school curricula.

The World Heritage Committee is responsible for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, defines the use of the World Heritage Fund and allocates financial assistance upon requests from States Parties.

It has the final say on whether a property is inscribed on the World Heritage List. It examines reports on the state of conservation of inscribed properties and asks States Parties to take action when properties are not being properly managed. It also decides on the inscription or deletion of properties on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Thirty-six sites are nominated for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List at this year's session. They are listed here.

Also during its session, the Committee will also examine the state of conservation of 94 sites already on the World Heritage List, and of the 46 sites inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Debates will be webcast.

A number of parallel events will be held during the current session, notably the launch of the Global Coalition for the Protection of Cultural Heritage: #Unite4Heritage on 29 June.
Somalia: UN official commends election of speaker of regional assembly

28 June - The United Nations envoy for Somalia commended today the completion of the establishment of the assembly of Galmudug, a region located in the center of the country.

“The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia Nicholas Kay welcomed the election of the Speaker of the Galmudug…by members of the assembly in Adaado, on 27 June,” said a statement issued this morning by the UN Assistance Mission in the country (UNSOM), which Mr. Kay heads.

Mr. Kay congratulated the newly elected speaker, Ali Ga'al Asir, and expressed satisfaction with the completion of this “important stage of the Central Regions' state formation process.”

He also commended Abdirahman Mohamed Husen, Minister of Interior and Federal Affairs, the Technical Committee, and the regional assembly members “for conducting a successful, transparent process of electing the Speaker and Deputy Speakers,” he said.

Stressing that the regional assembly now has the “critical task” of electing the President of the Galmudug Regional Administration, the Special Representative urged it to conduct this “important” process in a “similarly” transparent and credible manner, and to bring the state formation process to a “successful conclusion.”

UNSOM, the Special Representative assured, will continue to extend its “full support” to the state formation process, which will be brought to a conclusion with the election of a President, scheduled on 4 July.

Yesterday, the UN Security Council issued a press statement condemning the attack on 26 June against the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) base camp in the locality of Leego, perpetrated by Al-Shabaab, which has caused the death and injury of many Burundian troops.

“The members of the Security Council underlined that neither this, nor any other senseless act of terrorism in Somalia, would dent their resolve to support the peace and reconciliation process in Somalia,” emphasized the statement.

'We have this week,' says UN envoy, urging Libyan parties to quickly reach political solution to end crisis

28 June - From Morocco where he is facilitating the dialogue among Libyan parties, the United Nations envoy for the North African country has stressed that the coming week should be decisive to reach an agreement on the draft political proposal he recently introduced to bring Libya's diverse stakeholders together and ensure peace and stability.

“We have this week. Let us try to make it possible this week. Let us not wait for more time. What is possible now will be…a solution that will seem difficult in the short perspective, but I am sure it will be the right one,” said Bernardino Léon, Special Representative and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

“Let us be flexible and constructive in these coming…days and I am sure we will be able to make it,” has said from the Moroccan city of Skhirat, where is facilitating the latest round of Libyan political talks based on the draft political proposal he presented a little more than two weeks ago, and where yesterday he attended the iftar – the evening meal when Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset.

Mr. Léon encouraged the participants to take advantage of the occasion of Ramadan, hoping that the next ones will be “just to celebrate or to remember those hard days in which we had to negotiate the Libyan political agreement.”
The UNSMIL Chief added that all parties involved in the process must encourage their contacts, “all the people throughout the country”, to do “everything possible” to create the best environment for the agreement and to send positive messages about peace and reconciliation.

“There will not be real peace if there is not real reconciliation, and these weeks of Ramadan are the best time to pardon and only on this basis it will be possible to have a real and sustainable peace,” he stressed.

Finally, Mr. Léon mentioned that, during a conversation yesterday with forces from the city of Zintan, he was assured that every effort will be made to give back his freedom to Dr. Suleiman Zobi, a former member of the General National Congress in Tripoli, who has been kidnapped last year.

“And there are many other cases of people who have been arrested and this is the right time. We should not wait until there is an agreement and we start to implement the agreement. We should do these now. This is very important,” the Special Representative added.

**UN chief concerned over Burundi’s insistence on holding elections despite prevailing political crisis**

28 June - Reiterating his appeal to all Burundian political leaders to consider the wider interest of the people of their country, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today expressed concerns about the Government’s insistence on going ahead with elections on 29 June despite the prevailing political and security environment in the country.

“The Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon emphasizes the responsibility of the Government of Burundi to ensure that elections take place in a secure environment and also to guarantee the safety and security of UN observers so that they can perform their mandated responsibilities free from intimidation or harassment,” according to a statement issued this afternoon by the UN Spokesperson.

The Security Council, including through its resolution 2137 (2014), has mandated the UN Observer Mission in Burundi (MENUB) to observe the elections, while the International Facilitation Team “has been working hard” in Bujumbura to assist the Burundian parties to reach a consensus on the way forward for holding “free, fair inclusive and peaceful elections.”

“The Secretary-General deplores the intransigence of the parties that caused those important efforts to be inconclusive,” the statement adds.

He reiterated his appeal to all Burundian political leaders to consider the “wider interest” of the people of their country and to resolve political issues through dialogue “in order to preserve peace and strengthen national reconciliation.”

Condemning recent attacks reported in the country, Mr. Ban in the statement also appealed to all Burundians to refrain from violent acts, in line with the Charter of Non-Violence agreed by all parties.

“MENUB will continue to work in a professional and impartial manner, in accordance with national laws applicable to electoral matters and international instruments, principles and rules of election observation,” adds the statement.

Burundi’s political turmoil started in early April when President Pierre Nkurunziza said he would stand for a third term, a decision denounced as unconstitutional by the opposition.

Warning that the governing party and its youth militia use violence to limit freedom of speech and hate speech to obtain certain electoral outcome, Pablo de Greiff, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence stressed the utmost importance to disarm those youth militias.

“Voters must be free to support or to oppose any political party…without undue influence or coercion of any kind which
may distort or inhibit the free expression of the elector's will,” Mr. de Greiff underscored.

Today's statement closely follows a similar expression of concern issued this past Friday, 2 June, when the Secretary-General encouraged the country's authorities to consider the postponing of the elections. The legislative elections are scheduled for tomorrow, the presidential election for July 15.

At Stanford University, Ban says UN ready to build a better future for all

27 June - The United Nations and the international community are experiencing an age of great difficulties and opportunities which will help define the future of the planet, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared in a wide-ranging address that touched upon the myriad common challenges – from climate change to sustainable development – currently facing humanity.

Delivering remarks at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, yesterday afternoon, the Secretary-General told faculty members and others gathered that the marking of the UN's 70th anniversary offered “a good moment to reflect on the past” but also an important opportunity to have “a conversation about what we can do to build a better future.”

“The new agenda will build on the gains of the past two decades, when hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of extreme poverty,” he affirmed. “We want to finish the job while going further to build effective institutions, stable societies and lives of dignity for all.”

To that point, Mr. Ban indicated the upcoming climate conference, to be held in Paris in December, as well as the meeting on the proposed sustainable development goals (SDGs) and financing for development conference that will precede it, in New York and Addis Ababa, respectively, as crucial milestones along the UN's journey towards combatting climate change and ending poverty once and for all.

At the same time, listing the numerous peace and security challenges facing the UN – from Syria to Yemen to South Sudan – the Secretary-General observed that he had not only launched an urgent review of the Organization's peace operations but was also strengthening the UN's efforts to preventing human rights violations.

Mr. Ban also offered a few reflections on the situation in Asia and the Pacific, where the engines of growth and economic power are continuing to shift as China and India grow in global prominence and engagement.

Nevertheless, he warned, the region presented challenges that could place at risk the UN's goals of prosperity, stability and dignity for all, including competing territorial or maritime claims, political and communal tensions, and non-traditional security threats such as transnational organized crime.

“I have consistently called on all parties to resolve their disputes in the South China Sea in a peaceful and amicable manner, through dialogue and in conformity with international law, including the UN Charter,” he continued. “It is now more important than ever to avoid actions that would provoke or exacerbate tensions.”

The Secretary-General's emphasis on the SDGs reverberated throughout the day as Mr. Ban also met with the Chief Executive Officers of San Francisco's most notable tech companies and urged them to expand the reach of new technologies “to achieve the world we want.”

“I know the leaders in this room have achieved tremendous success by embracing great challenges and turning them into new market opportunities,” he stated at a roundtable featuring the tech heads. “When it comes to achieving the sustainable development goals, I count on you to show the same visionary leadership.”
In wake of terrorist attacks, Ban expresses solidarity with people and governments of Kuwait and Tunisia

27 June - Earlier today, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon telephoned both the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, and Beji Caid Essebsi, President of Tunisia, expressing his deepest sympathies to the Governments of people of both nations following Friday's deadly terrorist attacks.

“The Secretary-General expressed to the Amir his deepest indignation at Friday's terrorist attacks on the Iman Sadiq Mosque in Kuwait City,” said a read-out issued from San Francisco, where he is wrapping up a series of events commemorating the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Charter.

According to the read-out, Mr. Ban told the Amir that he was appalled that innocent people would be targeted in their place of worship, especially during the holy month of Ramadan.

“There can be no justification for such acts,” the Secretary-General said, referring to the vicious attacks, which struck countries on three continents this past Friday, 26 June, hitting not only Kuwait and Tunisia, but also France.

“He asked the Amir to convey his condolences to the families of the victims and his wishes for a speedy recovery for the wounded,” said the read-out.

In a separate call to the President of Tunisia, the read-out continued, the Secretary-General expressed his solidarity with the people and government of Tunisia following the terrorist attack on a hotel in Sousse on Friday. Mr. Ban condemned the attack in the strongest of terms.

“The Secretary-General reiterated to the President the United Nations' willingness to support the Tunisian Government in combatting terrorism through capacity building projects,” the read-out concluded.

Mr. Ban's strong condemnation and pledge of UN-wide support follows a similar statement issued by his spokesperson in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. That statement was quickly followed by equally strong condemnation from the UN Security Council and a host of senior UN officials.

As information was becoming available at the time, the Council, in its statement, laid out the circumstances of the separate attacks: against a chemical products factory in Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, France, triggering an explosion and killing at least one through a gruesome beheading while injuring others; a bomb attack in a Shiite mosque in Kuwait City, Kuwait, killing at least 24 and injuring many more; and gunmen attacking a tourist hotel near Sousse, Tunisia, killing at least 37 and injuring many others.
As Cyprus talks continue, UN envoy spotlights 'positive climate' of negotiations

29 June - Substantive negotiations between the leaders of the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities are continuing amid “a positive and results-oriented atmosphere,” the United Nations Special Adviser on Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide, has confirmed.

In a statement released earlier today, Mr. Eide reported that the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mustafa Akýncý, and the Greek Cypriot leader, Nicos Anastasiades, were now focused on “unresolved core issues” related to governance, property, and criteria on territory, as they both continued their pursuit of a comprehensive settlement for the political situation facing the Mediterranean island.

“Mr. Akýncý and Mr. Anastasiades discussed those issues at length in a pragmatic and constructive manner, making further progress,” the UN official declared. “They provided new guidance to the negotiators who will meet three more times this week to carry forward their work on core issues.”

On the topic of confidence building measures, the statement read, both leaders “took stock of the work done to implement already agreed confidence building measures” and also exchanged views on the economic prospects that would arise from a solution.

“With substantive negotiations now at the centre of their work, Mr. Akýncý and Mr. Anastasiades reiterated their resolve to reach a comprehensive settlement as soon as possible,” Mr. Eide continued, highlighting the “positive climate” characterizing the negotiations.

The next meeting between the Cypriot leaders is set for 10 July.

UN agency for Palestine refugees announces staff reductions amid funding shortfall

29 June - The United Nations agency assisting Palestinian refugees across the Middle East announced today that it will begin reducing staff numbers in an effort to cut costs amid a wider budget shortfall facing the Organization's presence in the region.

In a statement issued earlier today, Chris Gunness, spokesperson for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), confirmed that 85 per cent of all 137 international personnel on short term contracts will be separated in a phased process lasting until the end of September.

“UNRWA is taking this measure to reduce costs as much as possible without reducing services to refugees,” explained Mr. Gunness, noting that the UN agency retained a $101 million deficit but would continue nonetheless with “robust efforts in resource mobilisation.”

“As things currently stand, with stringent austerity measures already in place beyond today's announcement, the Agency should be able to continue with life-saving services to the end of the year,” he continued.

Among the ongoing efforts, Mr. Gunness said UNRWA would maintain its health programmes, relief and social services, and sanitation and emergency projects for which it had remaining funds.

At the same time, the agency's school system – which currently services half a million children across Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Syria – remains in a more precarious situation.
“Some difficult decisions may be needed in coming weeks if the deficit is not filled,” he warned.

The situation afflicting the Palestinians across the Middle East region is, in fact, quite dramatic, according to the latest UN data. Gaza today is home to the highest unemployment levels in the world, with more than 60 per cent of young people not working.

Meanwhile, some 60,000 Palestine refugees from Syria have fled to Lebanon and Jordan, putting pressure on host communities. From Syria's Yarmouk and Jordan's camps to the West Bank, the lives of Palestine refugees are constrained, with poverty and deprivation overflowing in overcrowded camps and the needs of the communities continuing to grow resources.

Adding to UNRWA's list of concerns is the dire situation facing the agency's emergency funding which, for its Syria appeal, currently stands at only 27 per cent met. UNRWA's Gaza reconstruction appeal is similarly underfunded with only $216 million in pledges received out of a total $720 million needed.

Libya talks 'very positive,' reports UN envoy, pointing towards preliminary political accord this week

29 June - The United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Libya, Bernardino León, announced today that there is a political agreement amongst the parties on the majority of the elements of the draft proposal they are considering, and he hoped to have them initial it later this week.

“It is not 100 per cent but it is almost 100 per cent,” Mr. León told reporters at the end of a “very long day” in Skhirat, Morocco where Libyan parties have been meeting on the draft political proposal he presented to the parties two weeks ago.

Describing the talks today as “very positive” he elaborated by saying “there are two, three positions that are not agreed by the parties” so they need to go back to Libya to consult with their respective constituencies.

“After all these nine months of work we just have two, three issues and this is what the parties are going to discuss tomorrow and after tomorrow,” the Special Representative said. “The idea is to be back on Wednesday and to have our next meeting on Thursday.”

“And on Thursday we will try to initialize the agreement,” said Mr. León, who is also head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

Looking further ahead, he said “it will pave the way for the discussion on the unity government and on the annexes. And only when all this work is finished the parties will be in a position to sign this agreement.”
UN envoy welcomes Bosnia-Herzegovina court ruling on sexual violence in conflict

29 June - The Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict today welcomed the decision by a Bosnian Herzegovinian court to secure conviction for and award compensatory damages to victims of war-time sexual violence, the United Nations confirmed today.

The ruling on the crimes committed in the so-called Kotor Varoš case – which dates back to the Balkan conflict of the early 1990s – was greeted by Zainab Bangura's Office in a press release hailing the decision as “a strong signal that there will be no sanctuary for perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence.”

“Too many women throughout the former Yugoslavia are still waiting for justice, while the perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence walk free,” the press release continued. “Yet, the court's ruling shows that no matter the time that has elapsed, perpetrators of humanity's gravest crimes will ultimately be held to account for their actions.”

According to Ms. Bangura's Office, the court's ruling also demonstrates the importance of legal aid and reparation for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence which, it added, must be “prompt, adequate, and effective.”

“It is essential that governments in the former Yugoslavia do their utmost to deliver justice, legal aid and comprehensive reparation programs for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence,” declared the UN official in the press release.

“I call upon the governments affected by conflict in the former Yugoslavia to take these measures on a regional and non-sectarian basis for the benefit of every survivor of one of wartime's most heinous atrocities.”

Security Council extends UN-African Union operation in Darfur for another year

29 June - Expressing deep concern at the “serious deterioration” in the security situation in Darfur, the Security Council has decided today to extend for one year, until 30 June 2016, the mandate of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in the Western region of Sudan.

The mission, known by the acronym UNAMID, will consist of 15,845 military personnel, 1,583 police personnel and 13 formed police units of up to 140 personnel each, says a resolution adopted unanimously this morning by the 15-member Council.

“In the context of the lack of progress on the benchmarks,” the Security Council, by the resolution, reiterates its endorsement of UNAMID's revised strategic priorities: civilian protection, facilitating delivery of humanitarian assistance and safety and security of humanitarian personnel; as well as mediation between the Sudanese Government and non-signatory armed movements on the basis of Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, and support to the mediation of community conflict.

The Council says the Mission must also continue to focus on the use of available capacity and resources to the protection of civilians across Darfur, by “continuing to move to a more preventive and pre-emptive posture.” Enhanced early warning, proactive military deployment and active and effective patrolling in areas at high risk of conflict and high concentration of internally displaced persons, are guidelines provided by the Council, as well as “more prompt and effective responses to threats of violence against civilians.”

While welcoming progress made in implementation of some elements of the Doha Document, including the completion of
some security arrangements, the Council deplores “continuing serious delays” in overall implementation of the accord. The Council therefore demands that all parties to the conflict in Darfur, including in particular the non-signatory armed groups, and other groups to immediately cease all acts of violence, and commit themselves to a sustained and permanent ceasefire.

The resolution adopted today also calls for an urgent end to inter-tribal clashes, criminality and banditry that affect civilians, and requests UNAMID to continue to support local conflict resolution mechanisms.

In the face of increased human rights violations and abuses in Darfur, the Council calls on the Government of Sudan to investigate and bring those responsible to justice, while emphasizing the importance of ensuring UNAMID’s and other relevant organizations’ ability to monitor such cases.

“The Security Council requests UNAMID to monitor, verify, and draw to the attention of the authorities on abuses and violations of human rights, including those committed against women and children, and violations of international humanitarian law, and further requests enhanced, detailed, full and public reporting by the Secretary-General to the Council on this issue.”

Meanwhile today, UNAMID issued a statement in which it expressed concerns about “recent media reports” that it has deliberately delayed assisting the Sudan Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (SDDRC).

“UNAMID’s role in the ongoing disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration process in Darfur is guided by the provisions set out in the [Doha Document], which provides for UNAMID supporting the SDDRC in its endeavour to disarm and demobilise former combatants from Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM-Sudan/Dabajo),” said the statement.

The Commission has requested UNAMID to extend its cooperation to the demobilisation of troops from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the Popular Defence Forces (PDF) as well as those earmarked by the 2006 Abuja Agreement.

While the Mission declined, on the grounds that this is demilitarization as opposed to a DDR exercise, UNAMID has nevertheless agreed to help with the ex-combatants identified by the Abuja Agreement provided that the Commission presents a “complete master list of potential combatants” to be demobilised.

“However, up to the present time, the Mission has not received this list and hence the delay in processing Abuja Agreement caseloads,” the press releases explains.

Despite such operational hurdles, UNAMID has managed to successfully complete the demobilisation of 534 ex-combatants in 2014 and is currently working with the Commission to demobilise the LJM caseload.

UN chief condemns deadly terrorist bombing in Egypt

29 June - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has condemned today’s fatal terrorist attack in Cairo which resulted in the killing of Egyptian Prosecutor General Hisham Barakat and the injuring of numerous civilians.

According to media reports, Mr. Barakat died when a car bomb detonated in the Egyptian capital’s suburb of Heliopolis. At least eight others were also hurt in the attack.

“The Secretary-General extends his condolences to the family of the deceased and to the Government of Egypt hopes for the swift and full recovery of the injured,” the UN spokesperson’s office declared in a statement released earlier this afternoon. “He calls for those responsible for the attack to be brought to justice.”

No group has, as of yet, claimed responsibility for Mr. Barakat’s killing.
Senior UN official urges global action to end years-long plight of some 2.6 million Afghan refugees

Expressing concern over the plight of millions of Afghan refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has called on the international community to boost its engagement, employ innovative solutions and pro-active joint advocacy to end the world’s largest prolonged humanitarian crisis.

"It is critical that the international community steps up to support the Afghan government in their efforts to create adequate conditions for Afghans to return home and restart their lives in safety and dignity," António Guterres said Friday at a press conference, wrapping up his three-day visit to the Pakistan.

Reinvigorated and continued support, Mr. Guterres stressed, was crucial to Afghanistan’s national building and reconciliation. He therefore suggested robust development initiatives, which create durable return in the long run and sustainable reintegration for returning Afghans, especially the youth.

The future of some 2.6 million Afghan refugees, with many having been living outside the country for over three decades, still hangs in the balance while fresh emergencies in the Middle East and Africa compete for global attention, warned Mr. Guterres.

Applauding Pakistan’s goodwill and hospitality as a host country, he also noted that "the unwavering generosity of Pakistani people towards Afghan refugees has contributed to regional stability but also more broadly to the global refugee cause at a time when we witness increased asylum fatigue worldwide."

However, traditional approaches are no longer sufficient for solutions in 2015, given prevailing challenges in Afghanistan, said Mr. Guterres, adding that, “in an environment of shrinking humanitarian resources, it is vital to pursue innovative solutions and creative joint advocacy and resource mobilization."

In this regard, UN-backed pro-active joint resource mobilization, together with programmes stimulating voluntary repatriation and supporting sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees, are among the preferred solutions.

As an important first step in these efforts, a joint mission to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries is planned in late August 2015.

Since 2002, over 3.8 million Afghan refugees have returned home from Pakistan, assisted through the largest voluntary repatriation programme in UNHCR's history.

Pakistan is currently hosting 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees – the largest protracted refugee population globally, of which 67 per cent live in urban and peri-urban areas, while 33 per cent remain in special refugee villages.