Security Council fails to adopt proposal to create tribunal on crash of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17

29 July - The United Nations Security Council was unable to adopt a new resolution today following Russia’s negative vote on a measure that would have established an international tribunal to prosecute persons responsible for the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, which crashed on 17 July 2014 in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine.

Malaysia’s Minister of Transport, Liow Tiong Lai, who introduced the draft resolution, expressed “disappointment” after the text was vetoed by Russia, while Angola, China and Venezuela abstained and the remaining 11 members of the Council voted in favour. If one of the Council’s five permanent members casts a negative vote on a resolution, the text cannot be adopted.

If adopted, the resolution would have urged the earliest possible finalization of the ongoing international technical investigation into the cause of the crash, in which 298 people died, and the criminal investigation. It would have requested Member States to work together in the Joint Investigation Team to continue to keep the Council fully and regularly informed of the progress of its.

The statute of the proposed “International Criminal Tribunal for Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17” was annexed to the draft.

On the first anniversary of that tragedy, UN secretary General Ban Ki-moon issued a statement in which he said “the victims must be honoured by a collective effort to ascertain the truth about the incident and ensure that any persons determined responsible will be held to account.”
At Security Council, Ban and UN special envoy outline ‘way forward’ on political solution for war-torn Syria

29 July - Describing the more than four years of “slaughter” in Syria as a “shameful symbol of the international community’s divisions and failure,” United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today appealed to the Security Council to endorse his Special Envoy’s recommendations on reaching the political solution that “all parties claim to support.”

“On March 28, I instructed my Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to intensify efforts…to find a political settlement to the conflict,” reminded Mr. Ban, who specifically asked him to work to “operationalize the Geneva Communiqué.”

Laying out key steps in a process to end the violence, Geneva Communiqué, adopted in 2012 by the first international conference on the issue and later endorsed by the Security Council, calls, among others, for the establishment of a transitional governing body, with full executive powers and made up by members of the present Government and the opposition and other groups, as part of agreed principles and guidelines for a Syrian-led political transition.

After extensive consultations, Mr. de Mistura came up with what the Secretary-General called a “viable alternative,” which the Special Envoy presented himself this morning to the 15 Council members, a day after the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien, addressed the 15-member body, painting a grim picture of the situation on the ground in Syria.

“What I am today proposing is to deepen the Geneva consultations format. I now intend to invite Syrians to parallel thematic discussions through intra-Syrian working groups addressing the key aspects of the Geneva Communiqué,” safety and protection for all; political and constitutional Issues; military and security issues; public institutions; and reconstruction and development.

These working groups will start generating movement towards a “Syrian-owned framework document” on the implementation of the Geneva Communiqué, explained Mr. de Mistura, convinced that this effort should be led by a “Steering committee” composed of Syrians from these thematic groups and possibly elsewhere.

“The framework document will also provide for a transitional governing body, procedures for a national dialogue, the constitution drafting process and transitional justice issues,” continued the Special Envoy.

In that regard, he stressed, the support of the Security Council will be “critical” to convince all Syrian and regional players to get involved.

“Syria is the world’s largest humanitarian crisis,” stated the Secretary General. “At least a quarter-million Syrians have been killed. Almost half the country’s people – 12 million men, women and children – have been forced to flee their homes. In a massive cross-border exodus, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq are hosting an ever growing number of refugees, and increasing numbers of Syrians making desperate flights across the Mediterranean in so-called ‘death boats.’”

Atrocious crimes are now almost an hourly occurrence, fed by a lack of accountability for the major human rights violations committed over the past four years and through decades of repression, he went on to say. The Syrian people have been exposed to chemical weapons and to new, indiscriminate killing devices such as barrel bombs and hell cannons, Mr. Ban deplored, as much as the fact that the conflict has given rise to terrorist groups such as Da'esh (also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL) and Al Nusra Front, and fuelled sectarianism and radicalization.

The Security Council unanimously endorsed the Geneva Communiqué, which remains the only internationally agreed basis for a political settlement to the Syrian conflict, he emphasized.
“[Mr. de Mistura]’s consultations made clear that the major stumbling block in the political process remains the issue of forming a Transitional Governing Body, with full executive powers that can create a suitable environment and safety for all during the transition,” the UN chief acknowledged.

The Secretary General said he stands ready to convene a “high-level international conference” to endorse any recommendations or agreement that the Syrian-led political process his Special Envoy intends to initiate may reach, including on the issue of the Transitional Governing Body.

**Orangutans face extinction on Borneo where deforestation is ‘simply unsustainable’ – UN**

29 July - The massive conversion of Borneo’s forests for the production palm oil together with the impact of climate change is driving to extinction the orangutan on Asia’s largest island, making it “clear that a future without sustainable development will be a future with a different climate and, eventually, without orangutans, one of our closest relatives,” a new United Nations report revealed today.

This, according to Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), who wrote the foreword of the report, The Future of the Bornean Orangutan: Impacts of Change in Land Cover and Climate, released today.

And the report’s lead author Dr. Serge Wich declared: “The current policies for land conversion on Borneo are simply unsustainable” not just for orangutans but for the human population as well.

According to the report published by UNEP and Liverpool John Moores University in collaboration with the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP), “the massive conversion of Borneo’s forests for agricultural development - primarily oil palm - will leave the endangered orangutans fragmentated and facing extinction in a number of areas.”

“The environmental impact of climate change exacerbated by the deforestation of Borneo could result in severe floods, temperature rises, reduced agricultural productivity and other negative effects,” the report said.

While native to Indonesia and Malaysia, a century of deforestation, illegal logging, hunting and expansion of agro-industrial plantations, have combined to isolate orangutans to only the rainforests of Borneo – the world’s third largest island – and Sumatra, says UNEP.

Borneo’s deforestation rate has been among the world’s highest for over two decades and 56 per cent of the protected tropical lowland forests – an area roughly the size of Belgium – was lost between 1985 and 2001.

The report goes on to say that if deforestation in the Southeast Asia continues, a staggering 75 per cent of the original forest cover will be lost by 2030.

*The Future of the Bornean Orangutan*, according to a UNEP press release examines different climate and land-cover scenarios for the years 2020, 2050 and 2080 and models the individual and combined effect of both factors on the orangutan habitat.

In each scenario, “dramatic rises” in temperature brought on by deforestation and the loss of land cover cause serious damage to the island’s biodiversity, with the combined model showing an even more pronounced impact than either factor alone, the report said.

UNEP’s top official, Mr. Steiner, urged adoption of programmes that measure the natural capital of a region and offer payment for ecosystem services to mitigate these threats.

“Now, it is time to utilize these approaches and divert from an unsustainable pathway to development,” he wrote. “It is clear
that a future without sustainable development will be a future with a different climate and, eventually, without orangutans, one of our closest relatives.”

An estimated 55,000 Bornean orangutans remain in the wild, according to UNEP.

“But orangutans’ solitary nature and slow reproductive rates leave them particularly vulnerable to forest loss,” the agency said. “Models incorporating projected changes to climate and to land cover indicate that 68-81 per cent of the current orangutan habitat might be lost by 2080.”

Among the 59-page report's eight recommendations to curb the impact of agricultural conversion are: immediate identification and protection of priority orangutan populations and habitats; connection of key orangutan sites through the creation of corridors, so as to ensure the species' mobility and viability; conversion to more sustainable methods of agricultural use for palm oil and other crops; and support forest protection programmes.

GRASP is an alliance of 100 national governments, conservation organizations, research institutions, UN agencies, and private companies committed to ensuring the longterm survival of great apes in Africa and Asia.

The report was presented at the GRASP Regional Meeting – Southeast Asia on Borneo in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

**UN projects world population to reach 8.5 billion by 2030, driven by growth in developing countries**

29 July - The world’s population is projected to reach 8.5 billion by 2030, 9.7 billion by 2050 and exceed 11 billion in 2100, with India expected to surpass China as the most populous around seven years from now and Nigeria overtaking the United States to become the world’s third largest country around 35 years from now, according to a new United Nations report released today.

Moreover, the report reveals that during the 2015-2050 period, half of the world’s population growth is expected to be concentrated in nine countries: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania, the United States, Indonesia and Uganda.

Wu Hongbo, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, whose department produced the 2015 Revision of World Population Prospects, the 24th round of official UN population estimates and projections, noted that understanding the demographic changes that are likely to unfold over the coming years “is key to the design and implementation of the new development agenda.”

United Nations Member States are currently in the process of crafting a successor agenda to the landmark Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which wrap up at the end of this year. A new framework, focused on poverty eradication, social inclusion and preserving the health of the planet, is set to be adopted at a special UN summit, in New York this September.

According to the report’s projections, the current world population of 7.3 billion is expected to reach 8.5 billion by 2030, 9.7 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion in 2100.

“Most of the projected increase in the world’s population can be attributed to a short list of high-fertility countries, mainly in Africa, or countries with already large populations,” according to the report.

At present, China and India remain the two largest countries in the world, each with more than 1 billion people, representing 19 and 18 per cent of the world’s population, respectively, but by 2022, the population of India is expected to surpass that of China, according to the report’s projection.

Among the 10 largest countries in the world currently, one is in Africa (Nigeria), five are in Asia (Bangladesh, China, India,
Indonesia, and Pakistan), two are in Latin America (Brazil and Mexico), one is in Northern America (US), and one is in Europe (Russian Federation).

“Of these, Nigeria’s population, currently the seventh largest in the world, is growing the most rapidly,” said the report. Consequently, the population of Nigeria is projected to surpass that of the United States by about 2050, at which point it would become the third largest country in the world.

The report also projected that by 2050 the populations of six countries are expected to exceed 300 million: China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and the United States.

And with the highest rate of population growth, Africa is expected to account for more than half of the world’s population growth over the next 35 years.

During this period, the report said, the populations of 28 African countries are projected to more than double, and by 2100, 10 African countries are projected to have increased by at least a factor of five: Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Somalia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

“The concentration of population growth in the poorest countries presents its own set of challenges, making it more difficult to eradicate poverty and inequality, to combat hunger and malnutrition, and to expand educational enrolment and health systems, all of which are crucial to the success of the new sustainable development agenda,” said John Wilmoth, Director of the UN’s Population Division.

In contrast to the growth projections, a significant ageing of the population in the next several decades is projected for most regions, starting with Europe where 34 per cent of the population is projected to be over 60 years old by 2050. In Latin America and the Caribbean and in Asia, the population will be transformed from having 11 per cent to 12 per cent of people over 60 years old today to more than 25 per cent by 2050.

Further to the report, life expectancy at birth has increased significantly in the least developed countries in recent years. The six-year average gain in life expectancy among the poorest countries, from 56 years in 2000-2005 to 62 years in 2010-2015, is roughly double the increase recorded for the rest of the world. While significant differences in life expectancy across major areas and income groups are projected to continue, they are expected to diminish significantly by 2045-2050.

**New UN-backed plan sets disaster resilience standards for hotels in Asia and Pacific**

29 July - A United Nations-backed plan to develop and pilot disaster risk management standards for the hotel industry in Asia and the Pacific, home to 80 per cent of the world's disaster events, has been announced today.

“The hotel industry in hazard prone areas of the world is very vulnerable to major setbacks from floods, storms and earthquakes. Such events can result in closure of resorts and have a significant impact on tourism and employment. The hotel industry has a very important role to play in encouraging disaster risk management at the local level,” the head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Margareta Wahlström, said.

A joint study carried out by UNISDR, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and the Global Initiative on Disaster Risk Management (GIDRM) has found significant interest in setting standards among hoteliers, tour operators, tourism bodies, government agencies and insurance companies in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and the Maldives.

The study was carried out for the Hotel Resilient Initiative which aims to develop internationally recognized standards for hotels and resorts that will assist them in reducing business risk and the risk of tourism destinations to natural and technological hazards, while demonstrating the level of preparedness and safety of their premises to potential clients, insurers and financiers.
“The report is telling us that there is concern about the lack of universal standards for disaster risk management across the hotel industry,” Mr. Wahlström added. One incentive is that insurance companies could envisage premium reductions for hotels that demonstrate that they are investing in disaster resilience in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction which has been adopted with enthusiasm by governments across the region. The standards will be developed at the end of this year.”

**Economic ‘slowdown’ predicted for Latin America and Caribbean in 2015 – UN regional forum**

29 July - Panama will lead Latin America and the Caribbean countries in economic growth that will average 0.5 per cent in 2015, according to United Nations projections released today, which not that to reverse the region’s economic slowdown, more investments are needed to boost growth and improve productivity.

Launching the Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean 2015 in Santiago, Chile, the UN Economic Commission for the region, known by the acronym ECLAC, forecasts that South America will contract -0.4 per cent, Central America and Mexico will grow 2.8 per cent, and the Caribbean will expand just 1.7 per cent.

On a national level, the projections show, Panama will lead the regional expansion with a 6.0 per cent increase, followed by Antigua and Barbuda (5.4 per cent) and the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua (both with 4.8 per cent).

Mexico’s gross domestic product (GDP) will grow 2.4 per cent while Argentina’s will rise 0.7 per cent, the report showed, but Brazil will experience a contraction of -1.5 per cent while Venezuela will face an even greater decline of -5.5 per cent.

Upon presenting its most recent annual report, the regional organization called for vitalizing the investment process to resume growth and improve productivity in the region’s economies.

“Revitalizing growth in the short and long term requires boosting public and private investment at a complex time,” said Alicia Bárcena, ECLAC’s Executive Secretary.

“The economic slowdown is due to external and domestic factors,” the report noted.

“In the external arena, the global economy’s slow growth during 2015 stands out, particularly the deceleration of China and other emerging economies, with the exception of India,” it said.

And on the domestic front, “a contraction in investment along with the deceleration of consumption growth, coupled with other factors, are contributing to a reduction in domestic demand, which has been the main factor driving growth in recent years,” it said.

The 2015 edition of the Economic Survey consists of three parts. Part I outlines the region’s economic performance in 2014 and analyzes trends in the first half of 2015, as well as the outlook for the rest of the year.

Part II analyzes the dynamics of investment in Latin America and the Caribbean, the relationship between investment and the business cycle, the role of public investment, infrastructure gaps and the challenges in financing private investment.

And Part III contains the notes relating to the economic performance of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in 2014 and the first half of 2015, together with their respective statistical annexes, which present the main economic indicators of the countries of the region. The cut-off date for updating the statistical information in this publication was 30 June 2015.
UN mission in Cyprus renewed for six months by Security Council

29 July - The Security Council today extended the mandate of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) for six months, until 31 January 2016, and welcomed resumed negotiations between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders to reach a comprehensive settlement.

Through the unanimous adoption of a new resolution, the Council also urged parties to implement confidence-building measures and looked forward to agreement on further steps, including military confidence-building measures and the opening of other crossing points, which could contribute to a conducive environment for a settlement.

The Council also called on both sides to continue to engage, “as a matter of urgency,” in consultations with UNFICYP on the demarcation of the buffer zone and on the UN 1989 aide-memoire, with a view to reaching early agreement on outstanding issues.

It also called on the Turkish Cypriot side and Turkish forces to restore the military status quo in Strovilia, which existed there before 30 June 2000.

Established in 1964 to prevent further fighting between the Greek and Turkish communities on the island, UNFICYP is one of the longest-running United Nations peacekeeping missions.

Ban condemns Israel’s approval of new settlement construction in West Bank

29 July - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the announcement today that Israel has approved construction of some 300 housing units in the West Bank settlement of Beit El, as well as the planning and construction of nearly 500 housing units in a number of settlements in East Jerusalem.

“He reiterates that settlements are illegal under international law, an impediment to peace, and cannot be reconciled with the Government of Israel’s stated intention to pursue a two-state solution,” said a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.

Further to the statement, the Secretary-General urged the Government of Israel to halt and reverse such decisions in the interest of peace and a just final status agreement.

“The Secretary-General remains concerned about the imminent threat of demolitions in the Palestinian village of Susiya in Area C of the West Bank ahead of a 3 August court hearing on a directly related planning petition,” the statement added, underscoring that destruction of private property in occupied territory is prohibited under international humanitarian law, and for which actions there must be accountability.
Security Council approves one year renewal of UN Assistance Mission in Iraq for one year

29 July - The Security Council today extended for another year the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and expressed its intention to review the operation’s mandate in twelve months or sooner, if requested by the Iraqi Government.

Adopting a resolution, the Council extended UNAMI’s mandate through 31 July 2016, and, in line with the recommendations in the Secretary-General’s latest report to revise and prioritize the Mission’s tasks, requested the UN chief, in full consultations with the Iraqi Government, to report back with further details within the next 90 days.

In the report, the Secretary-General describes a UN strategic assessment mission conducted from 21 to 29 April. Based on an overview of the current situation in Iraq as a point of departure, as well as extensive consultation with the Iraqi authorities and key national and international partners on the ground, the strategic assessment mission report endeavoured to look beyond the current crisis and to provide recommendations for UN strategy and configuration in Iraq in the next several years.

The Secretary-General noted that while the current mandate of UNAMI would benefit from some streamlining, any changes to the mandate be made in full consultation with the Iraqi Government in order to complement its priorities. To that end, his recommendations included, among others, for UNAMI to maintain its focus on political good offices, as well as to facilitate humanitarian assistance, enhance mission activities in human rights and the rule of law and play a support role in specialized areas such as electoral assistance, and stabilization activities in areas liberated from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

In the resolution adopted today, the Security Council noted that the presence of ISIL on Iraq’s territory is “a major threat” to the country’s future, and underscored that the only way to address such a threat is for all Iraqis to work together by addressing both security and political concerns. The long-term solution to instability, the Council stressed, will require Iraq’s political leadership to make decisions that will united the country. The Council emphasized the support of the international community in this regard.

Bahrain: UN chief condemns bomb attack in southern village

29 July - United Nations Secretary-General has condemned the bomb attack yesterday in the village of Sitra, Bahrain, which reportedly killed two policemen and injured several others.

“The Secretary-General conveys his deep condolences to the Government and people of Bahrain and the families of the victims and wishes a swift recovery to the injured. He calls for a full and transparent investigation into this terrorist act,” says a statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson in New York.