In the headlines:

- Ahead of pledging conference, senior UN officials urge donors to stand by Syrian people
- Boko Haram 'weakened' but still committing 'horrendous' acts, says UN regional envoy
- Senior UN officials stress need for employment, decent work to achieve sustainable development
- Deputy UN chief calls for 'hydro-diplomacy' as world faces growing water shortages
- In Iraq, UN chief pledges support as Government tackles ongoing threat from ISIL
- Vanuatu: UN relief official warns 'secondary emergency' looming, urges long-term aid
- At Egypt Summit, UN’s Ban, Arab League Secretary-General discuss cooperation on regional, global challenges
- Welcoming peaceful Nigerian elections, Ban encourages patience as polls wrap up
- ‘We must respond,’ declares UNESCO chief, launching #Unite4Heritage campaign in Baghdad
- Earth Hour 2015: UN dims lights to focus attention on climate action, sustainability
- UN strongly condemns deadly terrorist attack on Mogadishu hotel
- In Egypt, Ban calls on Arab leaders to strengthen bonds for region’s people, global security

More stories inside

Ahead of pledging conference, senior UN officials urge donors to stand by Syrian people

30 March - The crisis in Syria is getting much worse, characterized by shocking “levels of savagery,” the top United Nations relief official has warned, urging countries to pledge as generously as possible ahead of the Third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference kicking off tomorrow in Kuwait City.

“As we are managing to get more aid in through cross-border operations, we are seeing a closing down of our ability to get aid across conflict lines inside Syria. The situation is very grave,” UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Valery Amos said in an interview with UN Radio.

As the Syrian conflict enters its fifth year, 12.2 million people remain in dire need of aid, says the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which Ms. Amos heads. Nearly half of all Syrians have been forced from their homes – 3.8 million people have fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, and 7.6 million people have been internally displaced – making this the largest displacement crisis in the world.

“Needs are increasing and although the amount donors are giving us is also increasing, it’s not increasing at the same pace. I really want to thank our donors for sticking with us but we all know that a political solution has to be found so that the violence that we are seeing on a daily basis calms down,” she said.

Ms. Amos’s call comes on the eve of the conference to be overseen by the Secretary-General and hosted by the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The Third Pledging Conference aims to mobilize donor support and
raise funds required to meet the needs set out in the 2015 Syria Response Plan and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) 2015-2016.

Ms. Amos said the last two years, conference pledges made a significant contribution to the amount that needed for Syria and neighbouring countries. For example, last year, 90 per cent of the money pledged was received but this year the crisis has spread beyond Syria’s borders and the immediate region.

“What we are seeing are needs increasing not just in Syria and in neighbouring countries but across the world. As I speak to you, we are seeing a very difficult situation, for example, unfolding in Yemen,” she added.

She said that on the margins of the conference: “We want the neighbouring countries to be able to have a voice and have an impact on the region. From the Secretary-General down, we are all in contact with all the countries invited, asking them to pledge generously, and we hope they will.”

Joining Ms. Amos at the conference will be Mr. António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Ms. Helen Clark, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Ms. Ertharin Cousin, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP).

In a statement released today, Ms. Cousin echoed Ms. Amos’ pledge to stand by the Syrian people. “Together, we remain committed to the millions of victims of a conflict that has gone on far too long. As the crisis continues, the needs continue to grow, and the resources of the humanitarian response are stretched further and further.”

“Needs are also changing as the crisis enters a fifth year. We are now faced with Syrian children who have spent the first critical 1,000 days of their lives in a conflict situation without adequate food and nutrients. We must ensure our food assistance addresses the development needs of the most vulnerable victims of this crisis,” she said.

WFP is designing and implementing programmes to respond to the evolving needs of Syrian families. It is also working with UNICEF and other partners to encourage children to go to school through school feeding programmes.

“We must not lose a whole generation to war,” urged Ms. Cousin, who is also scheduled to meet Government officials, donor representatives and WFP’s non-government organization partners.

In all, WFP has provided life-saving aid to close to 6 million displaced Syrians every month through providing food assistance, vouchers and electronic cards.

Also at the Kuwait conference on Syria, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will be asking for $415 million to support some 560,000 Palestine refugees registered in Syria.

“If we do not receive funds immediately at the Kuwait conference, the programme of cash assistance to nearly half a million people will halt in a matter of a few days,” said UNRWA spokesperson Chris Gunness ahead of the Pledging Conference.

Humanitarian access to around 18,000 Palestinian civilians trapped in the besieged camp of Yarmouk in Damascus, suffered prolonged interruptions due to clashes throughout 2014, he added. There were only 131 days of access, during which UNRAW distributed an average of 89 food parcels a day. At least 400 parcels are required per day to meet minimum nutrition standards for all civilians trapped. Distribution has now resumed after almost three months of no access. During that time, many tried to flee the region.

“With almost no option for flight, Palestinians are increasingly vulnerable and speak of feeling trapped, singled out and unwelcome in the region. In worrying numbers, Palestine refugees are leaving Syria by unsafe routes to Turkey through ISIL-controlled areas or at the mercy of sea traffickers,” Mr. Gunness warned.
Boko Haram ‘weakened’ but still committing ‘horrendous’ acts, says UN regional envoy

30 March - As the Security Council met this morning to discuss threats to international peace and security caused by terrorism, top United Nations officials briefed the 15-member body on the impact of Boko Haram in Nigeria and beyond, warning of the group’s intensified violence and brutality.

“Though weakened, the group continues to commit horrendous acts against civilians, including against women and children,” said Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA). “Boko Haram’s recent allegiance to the Islamic State for Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), whether for publicity reasons or to tap into ISIL’s support, is also of concern as it gives a clear signal that Boko Haram’s agenda goes well beyond Nigeria.”

Mr. Chambas, who was joined in the Council by Assistant Secretary-General Kyung Wha-Kang of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, outlined reports of the abduction, abuse, recruiting, maiming and killing of children, saying schools in the country’s north-east and in areas of Cameroon and Niger targeted by Boko Haram no longer safe places of learning, with many attacked, looted, and destroyed.

“In 2014, the group also commenced using young girls as suicide bombers for attacks in populated urban areas,” he said. “We have also observed an alarming trend of children being used by the group as human shields.”

Ms Kang described the humanitarian needs arising from Boko Haram attacks, saying that more than 7,300 civilians had been killed by Boko Haram since the beginning of 2014 in the three ‘state of emergency’ States, including 1,000 people this year alone.

As many as three million people in northern Nigeria would not be able to meet their basic food needs after July 2015 without humanitarian aid and the work of Federal and State authorities was not enough to meet those needs.

“The humanitarian situation in north-east Nigeria and in the conflict-affected areas in neighbouring countries remains dire,” said Ms. Kang. “The conflict continues to have a devastating impact on women, children and young people, as well as on many others who have been traumatized by violence. Additional funding to address the acute humanitarian needs of those affected by the conflict is urgently needed.”

She said Boko Haram’s activities had created tens of thousands of refugees, returnees and internally displaced people in Chad, Cameroon and Niger, with schools and health services badly affected, and frequent reports of gross human rights violations.

Mr. Chambas stressed the issue of human rights abuses, pointing to evaluation missions launched by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) that visited the Far North region of Cameroon and the Diffa region of Niger. Both found human rights abuses, including indiscriminate killing of civilians, abductions and forcible recruitment of civilians into combat.

Since Boko Haram attacks in Diffa in February, Mr. Chambas said schools in the region remained closed, depriving children of the right to be educated.

“The local economy in the Diffa region is also being negatively affected by a continuing State of Emergency,” he said. “In response to these and other concerns, the United Nations is in the process of scaling up its presence and operations in Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon.”

Mr. Chambas commended the response of the Lake Chad Basin Commission countries, notably the joint regional offensive,
which involved troops from all four countries and which resulted in the recapture of several key towns in north-east Nigeria.

“At the beginning of the year, Boko Haram controlled some 20 local governmental districts in the three north-eastern states in Nigeria,” he said. “Today, Boko Haram holds only a few areas in Borno State. Moreover, according to reports by the Nigerian Army, on 27 March, Boko Haram’s headquarters in Gwoza was captured.”

Stressing UN support for such efforts, he underlined that counter-insurgency operations must be free from human rights violations.

“This is not only an absolutely vital principle, but also an effective strategy,” he said. “Communities which believe that their Government seeks to protect them are far more likely to cooperate with the authorities, and far less likely to support insurgent groups.”

He also reiterated the Secretary-General’s message that a military approach alone would not suffice in containing the Boko Haram threat, and stressed the international community’s obligation to help the countries of the region to address the social, economic and political challenges associated with Boko Haram.

Both Mr. Chambas and Ms Kang made reference to general elections that took place in Nigeria over the previous weekend. Mr. Chambas said that the observation mission by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had noted only “pockets of incidents and logistical challenges,” with the elections passing the test as “free and transparent.”

Ms. Kang added that despite reports of suspected Boko Haram attacks in Yobe, Gombe and Borno States, no additional humanitarian needs had so far emerged as a result of the election.

Senior UN officials stress need for employment, decent work to achieve sustainable development

30 March - Top United Nations officials today underlined the importance for States to create employment opportunities and decent work for all in order to achieve poverty eradication and sustainable development, and to fulfil the objectives of the new UN development agenda.

Speaking at the opening of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) three-day Integration Segment, the Council’s Vice-President, Vladimir Drobnjak (Croatia), said ensuring sufficient employment opportunities and decent work for all people was one of the most pressing challenges faced by nations today.

“Unemployment and underemployment remain top priorities for many countries,” he said, stressing the importance of focusing on meeting the employment needs of young people. “When we brought youth delegates from all around the world for the ECOSOC Youth Forum last month, we heard time and again that unemployment tops the list of concerns for these young people.”

Mr. Drobnjak said that social protection schemes around the world fell short of protecting vulnerable people and called for full respect for international labour standards and a commitment to non-discrimination. He said the Council had stressed the importance of inclusive and equitable economic growth in its 2012 Ministerial Declaration, which said it was important in order to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to promote sustainable development.

He looked ahead to the work that would be undertaken during the Segment, including tackling the question of how creation of decent work can help to promote the balance of the three dimensions of sustainable development. Integration of those elements was key to achieving the post-2015 development agenda.

“This is not an easy task,” he acknowledged. “It involves short-term trade-offs and long-term benefits. We will be exploring what these trade-offs are and how they are being addressed.”
Joining Mr. Drobnjak in addressing the opening of the segment were Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson and Einar Gunnarsson, Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations, who spoke on behalf of the President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Eliasson stressed what an “enormous and pressing” challenge States were facing as they attempted to achieve sustainable development through job creation and decent working conditions for all, pointing to several existing obstacles that needed to be overcome, including still high unemployment and underemployment, the provision of better jobs, incomes, working conditions and access to social protection, the continued existence of the informal economy and the harsher experience of conditions faced by vulnerable groups such as migrants, women, young people and people with disabilities.

“All these challenges need to be addressed if we are to build an equitable future where extreme poverty is eradicated, people are empowered and opportunity is a reality for all,” he said. “We cannot realize sustainable development without making job creation and decent working conditions for all a priority in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.”

Pointing to an “employment crisis” wherein young people were bearing the brunt, Mr. Eliasson said as many as 73 million young people were looking for work and were becoming increasingly frustrated.

“Their frustration is understandable and undermines belief in government and national institutions,” he said. “We must ensure that they get the relevant education and training for ‘employability.’”

In order to achieve growth that is both sustainable and inclusive, providing full and productive employment and decent work for all, Mr. Eliasson offered suggestions on how to tackle the issue.

Well-designed labour market policies would be essential in ensuring that women, youth and people with disabilities have equal access to jobs and employment opportunities, while investments should be made in a “future-oriented and green economy” to generate decent jobs, increase food security, improve public health, safeguard essential ecosystems and make cities more resilient.

Ambassador Gunnarsson, in his address on behalf of the General Assembly President, underscored that realizing the overarching objectives of the new agenda would require creation of opportunities for employment and jobs for all and he urged the international community to take “a holistic and integrated approach” to the problem.

“For many countries, especially the least developed and developing, this entails structural transformation and diversification of economies, to move away from low labour productivity sectors towards high productive sectors, such as industry and services,” he said. “Given that agriculture is a major source of employment in many developing countries, it is crucial to improve agricultural productivity and value-addition in order to increase output and raise incomes for those employed in this sector.”

He said that a fair and rules-based trading regime was critical and an agreement overdue and he underlined the potential contribution of tourism to employment, with that sector’s linkages to many sectors of the economy.

Noting that situations vary from country to country, Mr. Gunnarsson said each Government has to take into account their own reality and identify the right mix of policies.

“We cannot have a universal blueprint or approach to creating employment and decent work for all,” he said. “At the same time, international coordination of relevant policies, such as macroeconomic and labour market policies is important. For many developing countries, attraction of foreign direct investment, transfer of technology and capacity building are crucial for transforming their economies and improving employment creation capacities.”
Deputy UN chief calls for ‘hydro-diplomacy’ as world faces growing water shortages

30 March - The international community must gear up for a new era of “hydro-diplomacy” as the threat of water scarcity risks plunging the world into a period of geopolitical tension and stunted development, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson told delegates gathered at the General Assembly today.

“Water is one of the highest priorities for development and lives in dignity, as well as a serious factor in maintaining peace and security,” the Deputy Secretary-General said in remarks to open the High-Level Interactive Dialogue on the International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life,’ 2005-2015.

“The lack of water causes individual tragedies,” he continued. “And it also, growingly, constitutes a threat to international peace and security. There is a need for ‘hydro-diplomacy’ – making scarce water a reason for cooperation, rather than a reason for conflict.”

Mr. Eliasson warned that in a period of “intensifying disasters, both man-made and natural,” social and economic stresses related to water supply would increasingly flare up, spawning tensions between communities and nations.

The dire straits facing the world’s water situation was recently amplified in the UN’s 2015 World Water Development report, released by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and in time for last week’s World Water Day.

According to the report, the planet will face a 40 per cent shortfall in water supply in 2030 unless the international community “dramatically” improves water supply management. Demand for water is slated to skyrocket 55 per cent by 2050 while 20 per cent of global groundwater is already overexploited.

As such, the Deputy Secretary-General called for greater international cooperation based on the growing communal urgency and need for water around the world.

“Shared water sources have historically brought countries closer together. Instead of seeing water-sharing as a problem, we have to treat it as a potential solution, with the help of innovative and dynamic hydro-diplomacy,” he added.

Mr. Eliasson’s remarks come as Member States prepare to roll out a post-2015 development agenda that will focus on sustainability and which may also touch upon issues of issues of water governance and quality to wastewater management and the prevention of natural disasters.

Water consumption, the UN has noted, also directly affects quality of life for millions of people around the world in developing and least developed countries.

On average, nearly 1,000 children die every day from diarrhoeal disease linked to unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation, or poor hygiene. In three countries in particular – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Papua New Guinea – more than half the population does not have improved drinking water.

“The impact of water on human health as well as economic well-being is better understood than a decade ago, including water’s critical importance for households, industries, agriculture, cities, energy production and transportation,” President of the General Assembly, Sam Kutesa, stated in a message to the meeting delivered by the Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations, Einar Gunnarsson.

He observed that despite the considerable accomplishments made under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), some
800 million people continue to live without access to an improved water source while many more remain without a safe and sustainable water supply.

Nevertheless, as the international community hurtles through a year of critical international meetings culminating in the post-2015 development agenda negotiations in New York in September and the climate change summit in Paris in December, the chance to reverse course and build a better future remains within reach.

“This year represents a pivotal opportunity for the international community,” he concluded. “We are in the midst of an historic opportunity to change our world by improving livelihoods everywhere and protecting our planet.”

At the same time, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to water and sanitation, Léo Heller, sought to frame the issue of water within a human rights viewpoint, emphasizing that everyone is “equally entitled to have access to safe, affordable and accessible water and sanitation.”

“What is needed is a better application of resources – by identifying and targeting those who still do not have access; by practicing effective mechanisms for affordability; by integrating the principle of equality and non-discrimination in policies and programmes and by putting in place the necessary physical and regulatory frameworks to monitor who are benefitting from interventions and who are being left behind,” he affirmed.

“No one should be left without access to water and sanitation under the new post-2015 development framework.”

**In Iraq, UN chief pledges support as Government tackles ongoing threat from ISIL**

**30 March** - Despite recent military gains against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), “vast challenges” remain ahead as the Government of Iraq fights to consolidate its territorial integrity against the terrorist threat, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today during an unannounced visit to Baghdad.

“We will continue to do all we can to assist the people and Government of Iraq to end this crisis so that they may focus their energy and resources on building a more peaceful, stable, democratic and prosperous future for all Iraqis,” Mr. Ban told reporters in the Iraqi capital.

The Secretary-General warned that the people of Iraq had suffered “unconscionable levels of casualties” as a result of ISIL’s advance across the country which, he added, had caused the displacement of over 2.5 million people and the destruction of Iraq’s cultural heritage.

“The threat of additional and secondary displacement during ongoing military operations may overwhelm local and international capacities,” he warned, while calling for additional humanitarian resources in order to save lives in Iraq’s conflict-ridden areas.

He added that alleged violations or abuses of human rights must also be investigated and perpetrators need to be held to account.

A report by the UN human rights office (OHCHR) recently found that ISIL, also known as Daesh, has committed widespread abuses throughout territories under its control in both Iraq and Syria, some of which may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Compiled by investigators sent to the region last year by OHCHR, the report highlights violations, including killings, torture, rape and sexual slavery, forced religious conversions and the conscription of children.

ISIL’s attacks on the Yezidi population “pointed to the intent of ISIL to destroy the Yezidi as a group,” the report says, which “strongly suggests” that ISIL may have perpetrated genocide.

Iraqi forces are currently engaged with ISIL fighters outside the city of Tikrit, just north of Baghdad, amid a series of
military successes which appear to have put the terrorist group on the back heel.

As the Government of Iraq has moved in to reoccupy its territories, however, allegations of summary killings, abductions and destruction of property perpetrated by militias fighting alongside Iraqi armed forces have also arisen prompting some concerns.

According to the OHCHR report, retreating Iraqi forces allegedly set fire to an army base in Sinsil, where several dozen Sunni prisoners were held, and in another incident, at least 43 prisoners were allegedly shot dead in the al-Wahda police station in Diyala. Villagers reported being rounded up and taken to al-Bakr airbase at Salah-ad-Din where, the report says, torture is allegedly routine.

“Civilians freed from the brutality of Daesh should not have to then fear their liberators,” Mr. Ban said today, as he voiced concern about the allegations. “One form of violence cannot replace another.”

Meanwhile, turning to his discussions with Government officials earlier in the day regarding oil and revenue-sharing between Iraq’s regions, the Secretary-General also highlighted the importance of partnership between Baghdad and Erbil, the capital of Iraq’s Kurdistan region, suggesting that it was “crucial” in addressing the country’s security and financial crises.

It remained “essential” that any disagreements between Iraq’s regional constituents be resolved within the framework of the country’s Constitution, he added.

**Vanuatu: UN relief official warns ‘secondary emergency’ looming, urges long-term aid**

**30 March** - Two weeks after Tropical Cyclone Pam struck Vanuatu, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the archipelago on a tour through one of the most severely affected provinces Saturday, warned of a “secondary emergency” and urged a scale-up in efforts to provide the essentials to people in need.

“It is heart breaking to see the extraordinary scale of devastation,” said Ms. Osnat Lubrani, touring the island of Tafea.

On 13 March, Tropical Cyclone Pam swept through the archipelago, wiping out homes and infrastructure, destroying the electricity network and razing crops in the mainly agricultural country. So far, aid has reached all 22 storm-affected islands of the country, despite significant logistical challenges due to the geographic spread of the archipelago.

“While we can already see the positive impact of the Government-led emergency relief operation, we still need to scale up efforts to ensure all islands are provided with food, water, shelter and medical care,” Ms. Lubrani said. “The emergency is not over yet.”

Referring to the strength of the people of Vanuatu Ms. Lubrani continued, “At the same time I am also impressed by the resilience of the people who are already beginning to rebuild their lives with the help of local authorities and the international community.”

Ms. Lubrani warned that a secondary emergency could hit Vanuatu. The cyclone destroyed more than 90 per cent of crops, leaving a population that heavily relies on subsistence agriculture without a source of income and the possibility of long-term food insecurity.

“One of the women I met told me that they are in urgent need of income, having nothing to sell on the local market and no
money to even buy soap,” Ms. Lubrani said.

She also met with provincial authorities, assessed damage to local infrastructure and visited one of the relief distribution sites.

“We will continue to stand by the side of the people of Vanuatu and I call on the international community to support our work on the ground,” the Humanitarian Coordinator pledged.

The United Nations and its partners have started to provide families with seed kits to ensure long-term food security, and will support the government in restoring community infrastructure and reviving economic activities. But the world body needs $29.9 million to cover the needs of 166,000 cyclone-affected people for three months.

To date $6.4 million has been pledged since the launch of the Flash Appeal on 24 March but more support is needed.

**At Egypt Summit, UN’s Ban, Arab League Secretary-General discuss cooperation on regional, global challenges**

29 March - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Nabil El-Araby Secretary General of the League of Arab States pledged today continued cooperation between the two organizations and discussed strengthening international efforts on a range of issues as the League’s Summit continued in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

According to a readout of a meeting between the two leaders, the Secretaries-General reviewed the continued cooperation between the United Nations and League of Arab States and exchanged views on strengthening international efforts against counter-terrorism, and on Syria, Iraq, the Middle East Peace Process, Yemen and Libya.

Mr. Ban and Mr. El-Araby agreed to remain in close touch on the issues of concern to both organizations.

Continuing his programme on the margins of the Summit, Mr. Ban also met with the President of Egypt, H.E. Mr. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The Secretary-General congratulated Egypt on a successful summit and also commended Egypt's leadership role in many regional issues.

In a discussion on the Middle East peace process, Mr. Ban underlined the importance both of Palestinian reconciliation and of reconstruction in Gaza. Despite generous pledges made at the Cairo conference in October 2014, the Secretary-General underscored that the disbursement of funds for Gaza had been very limited, which had dangerous implications on the ground.

The Secretary-General and President el-Sisi discussed the importance of all sides continuing to work for a genuine two-state solution where both Israelis and Palestinians would respect their mutual security needs.

The Secretary-General then briefed the President on the difficult situations in Yemen, Libya and Syria, where his Special Envoys were tirelessly working to promote dialogue and stability and to end conflict in all three countries. Mr. Ban also briefed President Sisi on current United Nations initiatives to combat extremism and terrorism.

The Secretary-General also updated the President on a number of important on-going development-related issues within the framework of the UN, including the negotiations on the sustainable development goals, the upcoming Addis Ababa Financing for Development Conference, and the UN climate change conference in Paris at the end of the year.

Mr. Ban's discussions continued with Somali’s President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. The Secretary-General expressed condolences to the President over the victims of the most recent terrorist attack in Mogadishu.
The Secretary-General welcomed the President's leadership in the ongoing State formation process, including the establishment of the National Leadership Forum. He also emphasized the importance of inclusivity, especially of women, youth, minorities and other weak communities, in Somalia's State-building approach.

They discussed Somali stakeholder's commitment to meet key Vision 2016 timelines to complete Somalia's federal state formation process and to review the provisional constitution.

The Secretary-General and President Mohamud also discussed the alarming humanitarian situation and human rights concerns in the country, as well as developments in the region.

### Welcoming peaceful Nigerian elections, Ban encourages patience as polls wrap up

**29 March** - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has congratulated the people and Government of Nigeria on the largely peaceful and orderly conduct of yesterday's presidential and parliamentary elections.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Mr. Ban condemned the attacks reportedly carried out by Boko Haram and others who attempted to disrupt the polling.

“He is encouraged by the determination and resilience shown by the Nigerian people in pressing forward and exercising their civic duties in the face of unjustifiable violence.”

The Secretary-General's statement goes on to encourage all Nigerians to continue to maintain a peaceful atmosphere and to exercise patience throughout the ongoing voting process and the announcement of the final results.

“He calls on all actors to channel any complaints that might arise through the established dispute resolution mechanisms,” the statement says, adding that the UN chief believes that the successful conclusion of the electoral process will mark an important step forward in further consolidating democracy and the rule of law in Nigeria.

### ‘We must respond,’ declares UNESCO chief, launching #Unite4Heritage campaign in Baghdad

**28 March** - Taking an innovative step to support Iraqi youth and to mobilize young people worldwide for the protection of cultural heritage, Irina Bokova, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched today at Baghdad University #Unite4Heritage, a social media campaign to counter the propaganda of cultural cleansing in Iraq and other crisis-torn counties.

“Today, we send a clear message,” said Ms. Bokova at the campaign's launch, which took place in front of students, government ministers and university officials at the Faculty of Arts. “We do not accept cultural cleansing and we will stand together to do everything we can to stop it.”

#Unite4Heritage was conceived in response to the destruction and pillage of cultural heritage in conflict zones, most recently in Iraq. It builds on an initiative started by Baghdad University students on 5 March to protest videos of destruction and looting at Mosul Museum, the historical city of Nimrud and the World Heritage site of Hatra.

According to UNESCO, the campaign will use the power of social networks to create a global movement to protect and safeguard heritage under threat.

#Unite4Heritage invites people, especially young people from the Arab region, to send photos and write short stories about
heritage sites that are important for them. They can also send 'selfies' holding a sign with the campaign hashtag – to illustrate the concept of unity and the importance of cultural heritage to people’s lives.

“In Iraq and across the region, violent extremists are orchestrating an appalling campaign of cultural cleansing. They are seeking to divide societies, to sow hatred, to impose narrow sectarian views through violence and oppression,” explained Ms. Bokova in her remarks. “They are propagating this campaign across the world, using all forms of media, especially social media, targeting especially young minds.”

“When violent extremists say humanity is not a single community that shares values, when they say world heritage doesn’t exist, when they say pre-Islamic heritage is idolatry, when they say that diversity is dangerous, that tolerance and dialogue are unacceptable – we must respond,” she declared.

“We must respond by showing that exchange and dialogue between cultures is the driving force for all. We must respond by showing that diversity has always been and remains today a strength for all societies,” she said, adding: “We must respond by standing up against forces of fragmentation, by refusing to be divided into ‘us’ and ‘them.’ We must respond by claiming our cultural heritage as the commonwealth of all humanity.”

Iraq’s Minister for Tourism and Antiquities, Adel Fahad Shershab, its Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research, Hussain al-Shahristani, University President Abdulhussein Abdulrasul and Dean of the College of Arts Flaifil A’Ayed also made impassioned calls for action.

During her visit to Baghdad, the Director-General met with the Prime Minister of Iraq, Haider Al Abadi and the Speaker of the House of Representative, Salim al-Jabouri along with several other high level officials. Ms Bokova also announced the start of a project funded by the Japanese Government for the Safeguarding of Iraq’s heritage, and focused on monitoring, communication, awareness-raising, and technical assistance.

Earth Hour 2015: UN dims lights to focus attention on climate action, sustainability

28 March - The United Nations will go dark later this evening as the Organization shuts off the lights at its iconic Headquarters complex in New York and other facilities around the world in observance of ‘Earth Hour,’ an annual global event raising awareness about the need to take action on climate change and promoting sustainable energy consumption.

In a video message, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, said: “Climate change is a people problem. People cause climate change and people suffer from climate change. People can also solve climate change. Earth Hour shows what is possible when we unite in support of our environment.”

Organized by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Earth Hour encourages individuals, companies, organizations and Governments to switch off their lights for one hour at 8:30 p.m., local time worldwide, to focus attention on people-driven solutions to protecting the planet and building a bright, sustainable future.

The Secretary-General notes that this coming December in Paris, the United Nations will bring countries together to agree a new, universal and meaningful climate accord, culminating a “year of action” on sustainable development.

“By turning out the lights, we highlight that more than 1 billion people lack access to electricity. Their future well-being requires access to clean, affordable energy,” said Mr. Ban, stressing that with the world’s lights being switched off, Earth Hour shows what is possible when the international community unites in support of a cause.

First launched in 2007, Earth Hour has become an annual event, mobilizing hundreds of millions of individuals to participate and growing to become the world’s largest grassroots movement for the environment.

According to the WWF, the UN family will join the thousands of homes, offices, skylines and monuments that will go dark.
as the world unites to inspire collective action to change climate change. Over 1,200 landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco will turn off their lights. Close to 40 UNESCO World Heritage Sites including the Acropolis in Athens and Edinburgh Castle in Scotland are also scheduled to go dark in support of Earth Hour.

**UN strongly condemns deadly terrorist attack on Mogadishu hotel**

28 March - The top United Nations official in Somalia along with the members of the UN Security Council have strongly condemned yesterday's terrorist attack on a hotel in Mogadishu city that resulted in the death of many civilians, including the Somali Federal Government's Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Geneva, Ambassador Yusuf Bari-Bari.

"I condemn yesterday's terrorist attack in Mogadishu in the strongest terms and am appalled by the complete disregard for the lives of innocent civilians shown by the attackers," said Nicholas Kay, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

Mr. Kay went on to say that he was saddened to learn that Somalia's Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Geneva, Ambassador Yusuf Bari-Bari, was one of the victims who succumbed to his injuries last night.

“He will be remembered for his strong personal commitment to protecting and promoting human rights for all,” said the UNSOM chief, adding: "At this difficult time, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the Federal Government, the family and friends of all those who died or were injured."

Later in the day, through a statement to the press, the members of the UN Security Council also deplored the attack on the Maka al-Mukarama hotel, and expressed their deep sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims, as well as to the people and Government of the Federal Republic of Somalia. The Council members also wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

Paying tribute to the “swift response and courage” of the Somali National Security Forces in responding to this attack, the Council underlined the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice.

“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,” concluded the statement.

**In Egypt, Ban calls on Arab leaders to strengthen bonds for region's people, global security**

28 March - With a raft of ills plaguing the Arab world – from the “shameful” conflict in Syria to the “tinderbox” that is Gaza and the steadily unraveling situation in Yemen – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today called upon leaders gathered in Egypt to work with each other and the United Nations to “strengthen our bonds for the people of this region and the security of our world.”

“Today, war and violence in the region, reprehensible acts of terrorism and the seemingly endless Israeli occupation of Palestine, are causing enormous suffering,” said Mr. Ban in remarks to the League of Arab States Summit, taking place in Sharm el-Sheik, Egypt, stressing that the impact of all these threats transcends the Arab world and poses “a direct challenge to international peace and security.”

“To counter these trends, we must address the root causes that fuel extremism and violence. Even when security measures
are needed, reliance on military approaches alone will not solve these problems,” the UN chief declared, adding that security responses must respect human rights.

Indeed, fighting extremism while committing abuses is not only wrong, it is counter-productive, he continued, noting that whenever this has been tried, the appeal for extremism actually increases. Without good governance, the rule of law, respect for women’s rights and all human rights, long-term political stability will remain a mirage.

Nowhere are the problems of governance and radicalism more pressing than in Syria. The Syrian people have now entered the fifth year of a war that has ripped their country to shreds, said Mr. Ban.

“Speaking today to the distinguished leadership of the Arab world, I confess to you my anger and my shame. Anger at observing the Syrian Government, extremist and terrorist groups and terrorists relentlessly destroy their country,” the Secretary-General said, and that he felt shame at sharing in the collective failure of international and regional communities to decisively act to “stop the carnage that has afflicted the Arab brothers and sisters of Syria.”

“The crisis risks spreading as fast as our credibility risks shrinking. The Syrian people are being betrayed and this cannot continue,” he said, telling the Summit that he is instructing his Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, to intensify UN-backed political efforts and to consult widely with Security Council members as well as throughout the region, including with the Syrian parties themselves. Specifically, he and his team will work to operationalize and flesh out elements in the Geneva communiqué.

Following this Summit, Mr. Ban said that will head to the Third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria and he thanked the Amir of Kuwait for convening that vital gathering. “I also thank you for your generous contributions. I urge you to do even more to respond to the suffering and misery resulting from the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today.”

He went on to note that Lebanon remains unique in the face of the continuing impact of the Syrian conflict, including the growing threat by Da'esh (the Arab acronym for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL) and others, as it stands as an example of co-existence. “I urge Lebanese political leaders to overcome their political differences and elect a President to fill the leadership vacuum which has stretched for over a year.”

Turning next to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said seven months after the end of yet another war with Israel, Gaza remains a tinderbox – and the situation is getting worse by the day. “Neither blockade nor military action has made either side safer. I call on donors to make good on the pledges they made in Cairo last October. Help bring Gaza back to life.”

The Arab-Israeli peace process is further threatened by calls to discard or undermine the two-state solution endorsed by the international community and outlined in the visionary Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the Arab League's 2002 Summit.

“Once again, I urge Israel to end what is now nearly half a century of occupation. I urge the Palestinians to overcome their divisions. And I call upon the friends and supporters of both to push for a just and lasting solution based on international law,” the Secretary-General said.

As for the “unraveling” situation in Yemen and the tremendous toll it is taking on an already suffering population, the UN chief said that earlier in the programme he had listened very carefully to the statements by King Salman of Saudi Arabia and President Hadi of Yemen.

“I share those deep concerns. I have repeatedly condemned the attempts by the Houthis and former President Saleh to undermine political agreements by military force. I take note that military action has been undertaken at the request of Yemen's sovereign and legitimate leader, President Hadi” the Secretary-General said, also recalling the recent Presidential Statement adopted by the Security Council that encourages Yemenis to return as quickly as possible to an inclusive political process, conducted in good faith.

Negotiations facilitated by UN Special Envoy Jamal Benomar, as endorsed by the Security Council, remain the only chance to prevent a long drawn out conflict. “It is my fervent hope that at this League of Arab States summit, Arab leaders will lay-
down clear guidelines to peacefully resolve the crisis in Yemen,” he added.

Looking further to the west, Mr. Ban said it is crucial that the international community continue to encourage dialogue among the Libyan people. UN-facilitated talks between Libyan actors are continuing along multiple tracks, facilitated by UN Special Representative Bernardino Leon. The preservation of Libya's unity and territorial integrity is essential.

“In Iraq, I encourage leaders to continue and deepen national reconciliation efforts. I appreciate the League's support to the people and Government of Iraq in their fight against Daesh. This support also benefits regional stability.”

As for Somalia, the UN chief urged all partners to fully support the political progress in the country, while stepping up efforts to stabilize the areas recovered from Al-Shabaab control. On Sudan, he said that national dialogue is also critical and he urged that the process take place in a credible and conducive environment. “The Doha Document for Peace in Darfur provides a good framework to address the root causes of the conflict. Implementation efforts must continue.”

In closing, The Secretary-General said he is pleased by the ever-strengthening cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States.

“This must be a year of global action for sustainable development and dignity for all. We will reach the target date of the Millennium Development Goals and have the chance to adopt a new generation of sustainable development goals in September and a meaningful, global climate agreement in December in Paris.”

He also noted that next month, he and the President of the UN General Assembly would bring together leaders from different faith communities to a special event at the United Nations to promote mutual understanding and reconciliation.

Further, the UN Counter-Terrorism Center will submit to the General Assembly in September a comprehensive plan to address extremism and terrorism, and Mr Ban thanked King Salman of Saudi Arabia for his generous support for this initiative.

“As we advance on the post-2015 development agenda, and work for peaceful resolutions to conflict,” said the Secretary-General.

**Demanding 'immediate' ceasefire in Libya, Security Council extends UN mission in crisis-torn country**

28 March - Unanimously adopting two separate resolutions on Libya, the Security Council, in the first, called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and extended the United Nations Support Mission there (UNSMIL) until 15 September, and in the second, adjusted the arms embargo on the country in light of the terrorist threat there.

Further to that text, adopted yesterday evening, the Council expressed grave concern about the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also referred to by its Arab acronym Da'esh), its supporters and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaeda and about the negative impact of their presence, violent extremist ideology and actions on stability in Libya.

In a related provision, the 15-member body called on the Sanctions Committee it established in 2011 to consider requests for the transfer or supply of arms and related materiel to the Libyan Government for use by its official Armed Forces to combat ISIL and its supporters.

The Council also expressed support for the United Nations-led political dialogue between the Government of Libya and all Libyan parties that renounced violence, calling on them to engage constructively with the initiative of the Secretary-General's Special Representative and UNSMIL chief, Bernardino Leon, with the purpose of forming a national unity government.
Adopting the resolution by which UNSMIL was extended, the Council decided that the operation’s mandate should now focus on support to the Libyan political process and security arrangements. It would include human rights monitoring and reporting, as well as support for securing uncontrolled arms and related materiel and countering its proliferation.

Expressing deep concern at the threat posed by unsecured arms and ammunition in Libya and their proliferation, “which undermines stability in Libya and the region, including through transfer to terrorist and violent extremist groups,” the Council urged the Libyan Government to improve its monitoring of arms and materiel.

Also by that resolution, the Council extended the expert panel on sanctions until 30 April 2016, and parallel to that, the authorizations on illicit oil exports. It reaffirmed that the travel ban and asset freeze, first imposed in 2011, also applied to individuals and entities determined by the Sanctions Committee to be engaging in or providing support for other acts that threatened the peace, stability or security of Libya or obstructed or undermined the successful completion of its political transition.

Condemning the use of violence against civilians and civilian institutions and the continuing escalation of conflict, including attacks on airports, State institutions and other vital national infrastructure and natural assets, the Council called for those responsible to be held accountable.

Cyprus: UN envoy ‘optimistic’ about re-start of structured negotiations

30 March - The United Nations Special Adviser for Cyprus, Espen Barth Eide, will return to the Mediterranean island on 6 April 2015 to follow up on the encouraging indications received during his last trip regarding a possible resumption of negotiations.

“The Special Adviser continues to be optimistic about the prospects for a return to structured, results-oriented negotiations, and looks forward to this visit as an important step towards renewing the momentum in the talks,” said a note released by the Secretary-General’s mission on the island.

During his visit, Mr. Eide will meet bilaterally with the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders to continue discussions on prospects for the resumption of talks in the spring.

Together with his Good Offices team, Mr. Eide also plans to meet bilaterally with the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot negotiators in support of their substantive preparations.