In the headlines:

- Amid ‘steady rise’ in rhino poaching and elephant killings, UN urges action to tackle illegal wildlife trade
- On World Day, UN urges action to combat human trafficking, give victims ‘hope and justice’
- Partnerships can help small islands overcome ‘unique vulnerabilities,’ Ban tells Security Council
- Momentum building for UN-backed accord to combat billion dollar rogue fishing business
- UNESCO voices alarm at reported killing of Iraqi journalists by extremists
- Yemen: UN begins food aid distribution in war-torn districts of Aden
- Marking International Day of Friendship, UN chief hailing power of the human spirit
- INTERVIEW: "Every conflict has an end, and this conflict... has to come to an end after five years" - UN envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura

Amid ‘steady rise’ in rhino poaching and elephant killings, UN urges action to tackle illegal wildlife trade

30 July - Recognizing that wild animals and plants are an “irreplaceable part of the natural systems of the Earth,” the United Nations General Assembly today urged its Member States to take decisive steps to prevent, combat and eradicate the illegal trade in wildlife, “on both the supply and demand sides.”

Through the new resolution, the Assembly expressed serious concern over the steady rise in the level of rhino poaching and the alarmingly high levels of killings of elephants in Africa, which threaten those species with local extinction and, in some cases, with global extinction.

“Illegal wildlife trafficking not only threatens species and ecosystems; it affects the livelihoods of local communities and diminishes touristic attractions. It compromises efforts towards poverty eradication and the achievement of sustainable development,” said the President of the 69th session of the Assembly, in remarks read by Vice-President Denis G. Antoine.

Adopting a consensus text resolution, the 193-Member body encouraged Governments to adopt effective measures to prevent and counter the serious problem of crimes such as illicit trafficking in wildlife and wildlife products, including flora and fauna and poaching.

The resolution suggests “strengthening the legislation necessary for the prevention, investigation and prosecution of such illegal trade, as well as strengthening enforcement and criminal justice responses, acknowledging that the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime can provide valuable technical assistance in this regard.”

The General Assembly also calls upon Member States to make illicit trafficking in protected species of wild fauna and flora involving organized criminal groups a “serious crime.”

Member States are equally encouraged to harmonize their judicial, legal and administrative regulations to support the
exchange of evidence, as well as to establish “national-level inter-agency wildlife crime task forces.”

“The adoption of this resolution today and its effective implementation will be crucial in our collective efforts to combat illicit trafficking in wildlife worldwide,” adds the President’s statement.

**On World Day, UN urges action to combat human trafficking, give victims ‘hope and justice’**

30 July - Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged every country to join the fight against human trafficking as United Nations agencies and their partners vowed to work together to support and protect victims of this transnational crime, while pursuing and prosecuting criminals and their networks.

“The exploitation of human beings through trafficking is one of the gravest violations of human dignity that exist” today, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said and appealed for a “global anti-trafficking agenda” on in a joint video message by the Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons to mark the World Day against Trafficking in Persons.

In 2013, the UN General Assembly designated July 30 as the World Day to “raise awareness of the situation of victims of human trafficking and for the promotion and protection of their rights.”

In his message on the Day, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon flagged the need to crackdown on criminal trafficking networks that thrive in countries where the rule of law is weak and international cooperation is difficult.

“I call on all countries to fight money laundering and sign and ratify the UN Conventions against corruption and transnational organized crime, including the latter’s human trafficking protocol,” Mr. Ban said.

He also applauded the donors who have enabled the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons to assist thousands of people and called for greater contributions to help the many million other victims of this crime move forward with their lives.

In the joint video message, International Labor Organization (ILO) Director-General Guy Ryder, said “21 million of the most vulnerable workers have been tricked and trapped into forced labour.”

“We cannot stop until we get every single one of them out of forced labour,” Mr. Ryder said.

UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka noted in her message that almost three-quarters of trafficked persons are women and girls and almost all people trafficked for sexual exploitation are women.

And Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said “we must give them hope and justice.”

UNODC’s most recent biennial Global Report on Trafficking in Persons highlights the true extent of the crime. With at least 152 countries of origin and 124 countries of destination affected by trafficking in persons, and over 510 trafficking flows crisscrossing the world, no country is immune.

Coupled with this, society’s most vulnerable appear to be increasingly targeted by those responsible for this crime: 33 per cent of known victims of trafficking are children, a five point increase compared with the 2007-2010 period. Girls make up two out of every three child victims. Together with women, they now account for 70 per cent of trafficked persons worldwide.

In 2010, the UN General Assembly adopted the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, urging
Governments worldwide to take coordinated and consistent measures to defeat this scourge. The Plan calls for integrating the fight against human trafficking into the UN’s broader programmes in order to boost development and strengthen security worldwide.

**Partnerships can help small islands overcome ‘unique vulnerabilities,’ Ban tells Security Council**

30 July - The global challenges facing the small island developing States (SIDS) are the international community’s collective responsibility, today stated the top United Nations official at the Security Council.

“Combatting climate change, promoting sustainable development and addressing the vulnerabilities of SIDS will demand partnership, capacity and leadership,” said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who recalled that the SAMOA Pathway is here “to guide us.”

Last year’s Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa increased global attention on their contributions to sustainable development – but also on their unique vulnerabilities, Mr. Ban reminded to the Council members, who were meeting for an unprecedented debate about the situation of these countries.

From traditional armed conflict to transnational crime and piracy, illicit exploitation of natural resources, climate change and climate-related natural disasters and uneven development, small island developing States face a range of peace and security challenges, according to the concept note provided by New Zealand, which holds the rotating Presidency of the Security Council for the month of July.

Caribbean SIDS, for example, are vulnerable to drug-trafficking and gang-related violence, noted the Secretary-General, while unreported and unregulated fishing undermine local economies. Through its Maritime Crime Programme, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime is actively engaged to help these countries in these areas.

“Taken together with the broader vulnerabilities faced by many of these States communities, these challenges can disproportionately affect national stability, fuel conflict across regions and ultimately have an impact on the maintenance of international peace and security,” adds the Security Council concept note.

For the Secretary-General, the first priority must be to support these States in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

“Second, we need a post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals that address the needs of SIDS,” he continued.

At the recent Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa, which took place from July 13 to 16, it was encouraging that the concerns of [that group of countries] were reflected, including in critical areas such as debt, trade, technology and Official Development Assistance, Mr. Ban noted.

“Third, we need a meaningful and universal global climate agreement in Paris in December,” stressed the UN chief, as small island developing States are on the front lines of climate change.

“Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu is only the latest in a long string of devastation that SIDS have endured and will continue to endure as long as climate change is not adequately addressed,” he warned, underscoring that Caribbean countries sometimes experience as many as five hurricanes in a season.

Rising sea levels, dying coral reefs and the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters exacerbate the conditions leading to community displacement and migration, threatening to increase tensions over resources and affect domestic and regional stability, the Secretary-General went on to say.

“Leading by example,” many of these countries have been accelerating their own transition to renewable energy to secure a
sustainable energy future. But, to support SIDS in their actions to combat climate change and adapt to its impacts, “a politically credible trajectory for mobilizing the pledged $100 billion dollars per year by 2020” is needed, he explained.

The Green Climate Fund will need to be up and running before the Climate Conference in Paris in December, but a “meaningful, universal climate agreement” must be adopted, concluded the Secretary-General.

**Momentum building for UN-backed accord to combat billion dollar rogue fishing business**

**30 July** - Thirteen additional countries need to ratify an agreement brokered by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to combat illegal fishing by blocking ports to ships known or believed to be carrying illicit catches that account for more than 15 per cent of global output, the agency said today.

“A growing numbers of countries are ratifying an international agreement to combat illegal fishing, fuelling interest in how best to implement the instrument,” FAO said in a press release.

Illicit fishing, according to the agency, includes operating without authorization, harvesting protected species, using outlawed fishing gear and violating quota limits, and “may account for up to 26 million tonnes of seafood a year, more than 15 percent of the total global output.”

“Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is estimated to strip between $10 billion and $23 billion from the global economy, and its impacts undermines the way fish stocks are managed to make it a double concern around the world,” it said.

To help tackle the problem, FAO brokered the adoption in 2009 by its Member States of the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.

The FAO-brokered agreement comes into force when 25 countries have deposited their instrument of ratification, known as acceptance of accession. So far, 12 countries have done so, the latest being Iceland in June. Two more states will soon join them, according to FAO.

In addition to Iceland, signatories that have completed the ratification process are Chile, the European Union, Gabon, Iceland, Mozambique, Myanmar, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, the Seychelles, Sri Lanka and Uruguay.

“The Agreement promotes collaboration between fishermen, port authorities, coast guards and navies to strengthen inspections and control procedures at ports and on vessels,” it said. “Importantly, it also allows states to prevent the landings of catches derived from IUU fishing by vessels regardless of the flag they fly.”

Blaise Kuemlangan, Chief of FAO’s Development Law Service, said “the Agreement aims to harmonize port controls in order to prevent illegally caught fish from ever entering international markets through ports.”

The ability to turn away vessels taking part in illegal fishing will greatly reduce opportunities for selling their catch, decreasing illicit fishing worldwide, according to Mr. Kuemlangan.

The Agreement will also enable better compliance with the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which seeks to promote the long-term sustainability of the sector.

To assist countries in building their capacity to implement the agreement, FAO has convened workshops in all world regions, with the Atlantic coast of Africa being “a key priority,” the agency said.
FAO said so far Gabon is the only African country to have ratified the Agreement, but several others are close to completing the process.

**UNESCO voices alarm at reported killing of Iraqi journalists by extremists**

**30 July** - The Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) voiced deep concern today over the reported killing of two Iraqi journalists in Mosul.

“I am deeply concerned about the reported killing of Suahaa Ahmed Radhi and Jalla Al-Abadi,” the Director-General said. “It has become very difficult for the public to know what is happening in parts of Iraq, because of violent extremists. We hope the day will come when the perpetrators of these heinous acts will be prosecuted.”

Suahaa Ahmed Radhi worked as an editor for a Nineveh-based newspaper. According to the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate, she was kidnapped from her home by violent militants and killed.

The same union also reported that violent extremist militants stormed the house of Mosaliah TV cameraman Jalaa Al-Abadi and shot him in a forest on the outskirts of Mosul.

The Director-General of UNESCO issues statements on the killing of media workers in line with Resolution 29 adopted by UNESCO Member States at the Organization's General Conference of 1997 entitled “Condemnation of Violence against Journalists.” These statements are posted on a dedicated webpage; UNESCO condemns the killing of journalists.

**Yemen: UN begins food aid distribution in war-torn districts of Aden**

**30 July** - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has begun distribution of food to around 340,000 people in eight of the worst-affected areas of the southern Yemeni port city of Aden.

“We are challenging the odds to reach tens of thousands of people who would go hungry without food assistance. We are working to overcome insecurity, checkpoints and many other hurdles in Yemen to reach desperate families unable to feed their children,” said Muhannad Hadi, who is the WFP Regional Director for the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

WFP partners are distributing two-month food rations – including wheat flour, pulses and cooking oil – in a number of districts that had not been reached since April because of the conflict, points outs a press release issued today.

Three WFP-chartered ships delivered food assistance to the port of Aden last week, carrying a total of 6,800 metric tons of food – enough to provide emergency assistance for some 400,000 people for a month.

Since April, WFP has reached some 2.6 million conflict-affected and severely food-insecure people in 13 of Yemen's governorates. In July so far, almost 700,000 people are confirmed to have received WFP emergency food assistance.

On 22 July, the WFP-chartered MV Copenhagen docked in Aden with half a million liters of fuel – the first fuel vessel to reach the port since the beginning of the conflict in late March. WFP requires 1 million liters of fuel each month for its operations in Yemen.

Even before the war broke out, Yemen imported almost 90 percent of its basic food from abroad. The impact of traders
being unable to import enough food and safely move it inside the country has led to a severe spike in prices, which is increasing the suffering of the poorest and most vulnerable.

Many road networks in and around Aden are currently now either inaccessible or very difficult to reach due to infrastructure damage and fighting. Aden airport is also still not open to commercial and humanitarian flights, WFP added.

WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger worldwide, delivering food assistance in emergencies and working with communities to improve nutrition and build resilience. Each year, WFP assists some 80 million people in around 75 countries.

**Marking International Day of Friendship, UN chief hailing power of the human spirit**

30 July - United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today praised a Paraguayan man whose “profound vision that the forces of animosity and hatred in our world are no match for the power of the human spirit” led to the creation of the International Day of Friendship, which falls on July 30 every year.

“I had the opportunity, earlier this year in Paraguay, to commend that pioneer, Dr. Ramón Bracho, for his conviction that just as friendship builds bridges between people, it can also inspire peace in our world,” the UN chief said in a message for the International Day of Friendship 2015.

The Day was proclaimed in 2011 by the UN General Assembly with the idea that friendship between peoples, countries, cultures and individuals can inspire peace efforts and build bridges between communities with a particular emphasis on involving young people in community activities that include different cultures and promote international understanding and respect for diversity.

Dr. Bracho, who initiated the idea of the day, “had a simple but profound vision: that the forces of animosity and hatred in our world are no match for the power of the human spirit,” Mr. Ban said.

“As we confront the discrimination, malice and cruelty that drive conflicts and atrocities afflicting millions of people today,” he said. “We must counter these destructive trends with a renewed commitment to finding our common humanity and fostering shared progress.”

“On this International Day of Friendship, let us strengthen bonds among individuals and generate greater respect and understanding in our world,” he said.

**INTERVIEW: "Every conflict has an end, and this conflict... has to come to an end after five years" - UN envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura**

30 July - The Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, has been tasked with revigorating an inclusive political process towards ending the crisis in the country, based on the aims set out in the 2012 Geneva Communiqué, which was adopted by the first international conference on the issue and has been endorsed by the UN security Council.

During the tragic arc of Syria’s conflict, some 220,000 people have been killed, more than one million have been injured, 7.6 million have been displaced and four million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, according to UN estimates.

Mr. de Mistura has described the Communiqué as a ‘roadmap’ towards agreement on a
new Syria. Among other points, the document calls 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.

For the past year, the Special Envoy has been facilitating efforts, in Syria and throughout the region, to bring about a broadly inclusive way forward, including by convening in Geneva in early May a series of in-depth, separate consultations with Syrian stakeholders and regional and international actors. Those consultations, he has said, aimed to ‘stress test’ any willingness of narrowing the gaps in interpretation of the principles contained in the Geneva Communiqué.

In New York this week to brief the Security Council on his latest push to take the aims of the Communiqué forward, Mr. de Mistura spoke to the UN News Centre about the situation on the ground, the role of the international community in helping in the conflict, and his proposal for the next steps in executing his mandate.

We must be optimistic. Every conflict has an end, and this conflict – which is probably the worst conflict in terms of humanitarian consequences in the last 40-50 years – has to come to an end after five years.

UN News Centre: Where are the international efforts to end the conflict in Syria?

Staffan de Mistura: The conflict is going on, there is no doubt about it, but there are also some signs of a political – I would say – convergence regarding the concern that everyone has in the region and beyond about the fact that ISIS/Daesh is moving forward and there is a need to have a common approach to it. And everybody also, frankly, understands, that you can’t have a coherent fight against Daesh unless there is a political solution, an all-inclusive solution, according to a roadmap that already exists, which is the Geneva Communique. That’s where we are at the moment. There are gains, according to some, and losses, and this has been going on for five years.

Staffan de Mistura: Let’s say it frankly: when we had the Geneva II conference, Daesh was not even on the radar screen. At that time, the roadblock was between what is more important – terrorism and fighting terrorism, which was the position of some, or promoting an all-inclusive political process, which means a different type of situation politically in Syria. There was a block between these two priorities. Now there is no doubt that Daesh is a priority, but at the same time there is no doubt that everybody must and does recognise that you cannot win this conflict against Daesh unless you solve the conflict in Syria and the way to resolve the conflict in Syria is to have a political solution. A political solution means following up, in real terms, what you don’t need to re-invent is the wheel. You just need to push the wheel, and the wheel is the Geneva Communique, which is a roadmap for including the Syrians all the way through a new type of Syria.

UN News Centre: You were recently in the region for a series of meetings with different interlocutors. What did you hear while on the ground there?

Staffan de Mistura: The region is worried. There is a sense of urgency. That sense of urgency has become even more clear now because there is a fear that if Daesh continues to progress, taking advantage of the conflict in Syria and taking advantage of the situation in Iraq, we may suddenly have an empty area, in other words, a vacuum. And that cannot be allowed. That’s why the work now is towards a smooth, controlled but clear and effective transition: a transformation into a new type of political environment. People talk about it in the region and in Syria; what we need to do is make it concrete – and that’s what we have been proposing actually now to the Security Council.

UN News Centre: There is much on the international community’s agenda these days. Have you detected any sense of fatigue in it when it comes to dealing with Syria?

Staffan de Mistura: That’s the biggest danger for Syria and the Syrian people. That’s why it’s important to have a constant reminder of the humanitarian tragedy – which is increasing – and because there is always that danger of fatigue. But we can’t afford it. Syria is not only about Syria – it is about the region, its neighbours. Look at Turkey, look at Jordan, look at Lebanon, which has got as many refugees as if the US would have 100 million refugees suddenly in its own country. And, also, it is becoming the opportunity, perhaps, of a new way of resolving regional problems, not just by proxy wars.
Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura discusses the way forward for the war-torn country of Syria. Credit: United Nations

UN News Centre: What is your message to the Security Council?

Staffan de Mistura: The first message is that we are seeing tunnels. We are seeing tunnels of opportunities through regional and international discussions. What we need to produce is light in those tunnels. And the way to do so is to engage Syrians, in particular. Syrians have never been totally involved in what has been mostly a regional and international debate. And that’s why we are proposing four working groups – real working groups – on themes such as security, the future constitution, the political formula for the future of Syria – and proceeding to work on that, because sooner rather than later we may suddenly have to be faced with “Where are we? Are you ready?” and that’s the time when we should be putting it on the table.

UN News Centre: Can you elaborate on these working groups?

Staffan de Mistura: There is a moment in a conflict, even when it doesn’t look like there’s a solution, but you sense, you feel, that the countries in the region and internationally are looking for a formula, a logical formula. You need to prepare for that. And Syrians have always felt that their future should be discussed with them. So far this has been in international conferences, so now is the time. And we have tested this with our meetings in Geneva, where we have met with more than 200 different Syrian entities. They have a lot to say and there is a lot in common among them. They want the unity of their country, they want the integrity, respect and dignity of their country, they want their territory and the borders to be respected, they want respect for minorities – and they don’t want terrorism. But they also want a new government. A government which includes everyone, and which will apply an international approach to democracy, to the rule of law and so on. All of that is, in a way, included in the Geneva Communique, which has been the only roadmap agreed upon about three years ago but nothing has happened on it.

So the idea is to establish four working groups of Syrians to start talking and working – helped by the UN, otherwise it won’t work – in the direction of each of the themes, which could be part of the future architecture of Syria once there is a political agreement.

One is the humanitarian issue, which means access. People are requesting a format through which access can be guaranteed for many things: medicines, humanitarian aid, food.

Another one is security. At a certain point we have all learnt that we cannot repeat the mistakes of Iraq, or Libya, or Somalia even. Actually, if Syria continues, that could be a combination of all three, God forbid. So what you have to do is maintain the institutions. But, of course, the institutions without blood on their hands and with certain rules of the game in place.

And there is, of course, the mother of all issues: the political process. And that means how to get into a [political] transition, through a transitional governing body, but do so in a way that you are not actually producing an immediate shake-up, rather, a scenario where you are getting, gradually but clearly, to a different political scenario, where everyone is included. All that can be part and should be part of this working group, so that when the right time comes – and it could be any time, because things are happening, both politically and militarily – the working groups would be ready.

UN News Centre: Your service with the United Nations has seen you working in some challenging political environments – including Iraq and Afghanistan. How do Syrian compare?

Staffan de Mistura: I have been with the UN for 42 years, and I have never seen such a cynical series of reasons for which a conflict like this one, which could have been solved, has been going on for five years, with 220,000-240,000 killed, one million wounded and four million refugees. But, at the same time, I’m also realizing that if there’s one institution that cannot abandon the Syrians, it’s the UN.

We have had many attempts, and we’ll continue pushing, because at the end of the day, what is happening at the moment, is that we are having a whole generation of Syrians, young kids, who have seen only war, and this is getting worse. And there
is no military solution. None at all. Everybody knows it, the government and the opposition, and everybody who is involved on both sides.

UN News Centre: Is there any reason to be optimistic about the efforts currently underway to end the war?

Staffan de Mistura: We must be optimistic. Every conflict has an end, and this conflict – which is probably the worst conflict in terms of humanitarian consequences in the last 40-50 years – has to come to an end after five years. We are seeing signals that not only are people exhausted – and we knew that – but also governments, countries, players and stakeholders are getting tired. And above all the feeling is that in all this, the only one that is gaining ground is Daesh.