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Ban names retired Dutch general to lead probe into South Sudan violence



IDP's that took refuge and protection with UNMISS, pack up their belongings following five straight days of heavy clashes in Juba in early July. Photo: UNMISS/Eric Kanalstein

23 August – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appointed Major General (retired) Patrick Cammaert of the Netherlands to lead an independent special investigation into the violence in South Sudan's capital, Juba, in July 2016, and the response of the UN mission in the country (UNMISS).

According to a statement issued by Mr. Ban's office, the investigation will review reports of incidents of attacks on civilians and cases of sexual violence that occurred within or in the vicinity of the UN House Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites in the South Sudanese capital, Juba.

“[The investigation] will also determine the actions of UNMISS and whether the Mission responded appropriately to prevent these incidents and protect civilians within its resources and capabilities at

the time,” noted the statement.

“In addition, the investigation will review the circumstances surrounding the attack on the Terrain Hotel and assess the Mission's response,” it added.



The statement noted that the special investigation team will also undertake a field visit to the Juba to conduct interviews with the relevant interlocutors. A final report of the probe will be presented to the Secretary-General within one month, the findings of which will be made public, it added.

Major General (retired) Cammaert had a distinguished military career in both the Netherlands with the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps and the UN, including as Force Commander in UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), as Military Advisor to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and as General Officer Commanding the Eastern Division in the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).

Recently, he led a Headquarters-Board of Inquiry on the circumstances of the clashes that occurred in the UNMISS PoC site in Malakal, South Sudan, on 17-18 February 2016.

On 17 August, alarmed by preliminary findings on the 11 July attack on a the Hotel Terrain in the nation's capital, in which one person was killed and several civilians were raped and beaten by men in uniform, Mr. Ban decided to launch the independent investigation to examine this and other incidents and evaluate the overall response by UNMISS.

The incidents occurred during a spate of recent clashes between rival forces – the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing First Vice-President Riek Machar – that broke out in and around Juba, on 7 July, close to the fifth anniversary of the country's independence.

UN compounds and UNMISS-managed civilian protection sites were attacked during the fighting and, according to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, a preliminary UN investigation into the violence and its aftermath revealed that Government security forces carried out killings and rapes, and looted and destroyed properties.

The young country has faced ongoing challenges since a political face-off between the two leaders erupted into full blown conflict in December 2013. The crisis has produced one of the world's worst displacement situations with immense suffering for civilians.

Despite the August 2015 peace agreement that formally ended the war, conflict and instability have also spread to previously unaffected areas in the Greater Equatoria and Greater Bahr-El-Ghazal regions of South Sudan. This past month, deadly clashes in once-stable Wau resulted in the deaths of more than 40 people, while up to 35,000 fled their homes.

UN sounds alarm as 4.5 million people need food aid in Boko Haram-hit north-east Nigeria

23 August – The number of people in need of food assistance in north-eastern Nigeria has nearly doubled to 4.5 million from March, according to a mid-August analysis by various agencies including the World Food Programme (WFP).

“All indications point to an extremely grave situation,” said Abdou Dieng, the UN agency's Regional Director for West Africa, in a news release.

“As the rains set in and the lean season deepens, and more areas are opened up to access humanitarian aid, the full scale of hunger and devastation is likely to come to light,” he added.

In the states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, the number of people “struggling with severe food insecurity,” or in an “emergency phase” requiring food assistance to survive, has risen fourfold since March to exceed one million, the analysis found. The Boko Haram-related insurgency in these states has caused population displacement, disruption in livelihoods, and acute food insecurity.



After fleeing Boko Haram violence, a child, at Dalori 2, a displaced people's camp located on the outskirts of Maiduguri, Nigeria, eats Plumpy'sup, a ready-to-use, highly nutritious food to combat malnutrition. Photo: WFP/Simon Pierre Diouf

Moreover, it is estimated that at least 65,000 people in newly liberated but still inaccessible areas in Borno and Yobe are facing “famine-like” conditions.

The situation remains fluid, with more people uprooted in areas where fighting goes on. Some formerly displaced people are meanwhile returning to find their rural homes uninhabitable: forced to stay in urban areas, they are entirely reliant on external assistance.

Further burdened with spiraling inflation, families have to beg, run up debts or skip meals to survive. Many are reduced to consuming low-nutrient foods – and then, only once a day.

A worsening economy could push up the number of people in need of food assistance in the country’s northeast by another million as early as next month. A separate food assessment by WFP has warned of soaring prices in areas affected by the Boko Haram insurgency.

WFP is scaling up its response, aiming to reach over 700,000 people with food and cash assistance in the coming months. This will include specialized nutritious food for 150,000 children under age five.

WFP requires \$52 million to continue providing life-saving assistance until the end of the year in north-eastern Nigeria.

Mr. Dieng noted that tens of people have been killed or injured in Nigeria and in neighbouring Chad, Cameroon and Niger in the past days alone, an indication that Boko Haram violence is set to keep pushing more people into hunger and suffering.

DR Congo: UN chief notes holding of preparatory meeting towards national dialogue



African Union facilitator Edem Kodjo (left) addresses the meeting of the preparatory committee to the national dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Photo: MONUSCO/Theophane Kinda

23 August – Noting today’s meeting of the national dialogue preparatory committee in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reiterated a call for an inclusive political dialogue to overcome an impasse in the electoral process.

The Secretary-General “continues to follow closely” the situation in the country, particularly the political dialogue process, and “takes note of” the preparatory committee’s meeting convened by Edem Kodjo, the Facilitator of the African Union, his spokesperson said in a statement.

According to the statement, the UN chief recalled that in 2277 (2016) the Security Council underlined the importance of a credible and inclusive political dialogue to ensure peaceful, credible, inclusive, transparent and timely presidential and legislative elections, in line with the Constitution.

“The Secretary-General once again calls on all political stakeholders in the DRC to engage in an inclusive political dialogue in good faith to overcome the impasse in the electoral process,” the statement said.

Further, Mr. Ban noted that there is no alternative to a credible political dialogue and urged all actors to refrain from any action that could increase tensions or lead to violence, the statement said.

'All of humanity is part of this story,' UNESCO says on Day to remember slavery and its abolition



Shackles used to bind slaves. UN Photo/Mark Garten

23 August – The courage of the men and women who in August 1791 revolted against slavery in Haiti “has created obligations for us,” the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said on the day set aside for remembrance of that rebellion, noting that “all of humanity is part of this story” and efforts to teach the history of the slave trade will help build a better world.

“The uprising was a turning point in human history, greatly impacting the establishment of universal human rights, for which we are all indebted,” said UNESCO Director-General in her message for the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, marked annually on 23 August to commemorate the night in 1791 when people who had been torn from Africa and

sold into slavery revolted against the slave system to obtain freedom and independence for Haiti, gained in 1804.

She said that UNESCO is marking the Day of Remembrance to pay tribute to all those who fought for freedom, and, in their name, to continue teaching about their story and the values therein.

“The history of the slave trade and slavery created a storm of rage, cruelty and bitterness that has not yet abated,” said the Director- General, “but the courage of these men and women has created obligations for us.”

She acknowledged that the success of this rebellion, led by the slaves themselves, is a deep source of inspiration today for the fight against all forms of servitude, racism, prejudice, racial discrimination and social injustice that are a legacy of slavery.

“All of humanity is part of this story, in its transgressions and good deeds,” Ms. Bokova noted.

Through its project The Slave Route, UNESCO intends to find in this collective memory the strength to build a better world and to show the historical and moral connections that unite different peoples.

In this same frame of mind, the UN proclaimed the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024). UNESCO is contributing to it through its educational, cultural and scientific programmes so as to promote the contribution of people of African descent to building modern societies and ensuring dignity and equality for all human beings, without distinction.

To escape gangs and poverty, Central American children making risky journey to US – UNICEF

23 August – The flow of refugee and migrant children – seeking refuge from brutal gangs and stifling poverty in Central America and making their way to the United States – shows no sign of letting up, despite the risks of being kidnapped, trafficked, raped, or killed on the journey, a report from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) found.

In the first six months of 2016, almost 26,000 unaccompanied children and close to 29,700 people travelling as a family – mostly mothers and young children – were apprehended at the US border, according to the report, *Broken Dreams: Central American Children's Dangerous Journey to the United States*.

“It is heart-rending to think of these children – most of them teenagers, but some even younger – making the gruelling and extremely dangerous journey in search of safety and a better life. This flow of young refugees and migrants highlights the critical importance of tackling the violence and socio-economic conditions in their countries of origin,” said UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director, Justin Forsyth, in a press release.

The report was released ahead of the UN Summit on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants, on 19 September at UN Headquarters, in New York, as well as a summit on the global refugee crisis, hosted by US President Barack Obama during the high-level segment of the 71st session of the UN General Assembly on 20 September.

According to the report, most of the apprehended people are from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, which have some of the world's highest murder rates. They seek to get away from brutal gangs that target them or poverty and exclusion that deprive them of education and hope. Many also travel north to reunify with their families.

Many of the adults and some of the children apprehended at the US border are deported in expedited proceedings, women and young children spend weeks, and at times months in detention, while unaccompanied children may face years of uncertainty as their cases go before immigration courts, the report noted.

If deported, some of them could be killed or raped by the gangs they had sought to escape in the first place, and all these children need protection every step of the way – at home, along the journey and at their destination, the report stressed.

Data shows unaccompanied children who do not have an attorney in US immigration hearings – 40 per cent – are more likely to be deported than those who do. In recent cases, 40 per cent of unrepresented children were ordered deported, as compared to 3 per cent for represented children.

In the first six months of 2014, more than 44,500 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the US border; the number dropped to almost 18,500 in the same period in 2015 and rose again this year to almost 26,000 by June, the report said.

Further, the report noted that thousands never make it as far as the US border. In the first six months of 2016, more than 16,000 refugee and migrant children from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras were apprehended in Mexico. In addition, hundreds of refugees and migrants die every year in the harsh environment along the Mexico-US border. Many more are missing and are feared to have been kidnapped, trafficked or murdered.

UNICEF said that detention of children on the basis of their migration status should be prevented. Children also should have full access to healthcare and other services and should be allowed to live with their families whenever possible.



Alexis, 18, with his brother Wilson, 6, and their pet, a Caracara, at home in Omoa, Honduras. Photo: UNICEF/Adriana Zehbrauskas

Together with its partners, UNICEF is working to address the causes of migration by supporting the efforts of governments to improve children's lives and address communal and criminal violence in countries of origin.

UNICEF also works to strengthen services that reduce the vulnerability of children to violence, with a strong focus on education and health. It also advocates for the protection of children's rights throughout their journey, and for governments to provide assistance to returnee children.

“We must remember that children, whatever their status, are first and foremost children. We have a duty to keep them safe in a healthy and nurturing environment,” Mr. Forsyth said.

Iraq: UN refugee agency readies for massive displacement amid military offensive in Mosul



A displaced family from Mosul living at Baharka Camp on the outskirts of Erbil, Iraq. Photo: UNHCR/Cingzir Yar

23 August – With military action turning towards retaking Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, the United Nations refugee agency warns that displacement may worsen “dramatically,” and announced preparations to ramp up operations and set up additional camps.

“Already, in recent months, some 213,000 people have fled their homes in different parts of the country,” Adrian Edwards, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) told journalists at the regular press briefing in Geneva today.

“This includes 48,000 people from the Mosul area; 87,000 from the Falluja region; and 78,000 from Shirqat, Qayyara and surrounds,” he said, explaining that the humanitarian impact of a military offensive there is expected to be enormous – with predictions of up to 1.2

million affected people.

“UNHCR is doing what it can amid enormous challenges to build more camps to accommodate people and mitigate suffering, but additional land for camps and funding is still needed,” said Mr. Edwards.

Iraq is already one of the world's biggest internal displacement situations. Since January 2014, some 3.38 million people have fled their homes – among them, families who have been displaced multiple times.

“UNHCR continues to advocate, in a volatile, fast-evolving and complex conflict, for freedom of movement of civilian populations,” the spokesperson elaborated. “This is especially critical when it comes to people fleeing combat zones. Everything possible should be done to ensure the safety and dignity of people affected,” he added.

The UN agency provides humanitarian support, including shelter, emergency relief kits and protection services, such as legal aid for displaced families. With the impending situation in Mosul, it is currently expanding its efforts to assist hundreds of thousands more.

As part of an inter-agency response, contingency plans have been drawn up to provide shelter assistance for up to 120,000 people fleeing Mosul and the surrounding areas. Across the region, a series of camps are in the process of being expanded or established while other shelter options are being prepared.

In July and August, two camps were completed in Debaga, in Erbil Governorate, to house displaced Iraqis who fled villages to the east of the Tigris River.

“Due to the number of daily new arrivals, UNHCR is looking to construct an additional site, and we are awaiting land to be made available by the local authorities,” Mr. Edwards continued, and added that Debaga has swollen nearly ten-fold in just a few months – from a camp housing 3,500 displaced people in March to several sites now housing more than 34,000.

He went on to update reporters that north of Mosul, work is almost complete at Zelekan site in Sheikhan district – with a capacity for 1,200 tents – while preparations at Amalla site in Telafar district, north-west of Mosul, are under way for a camp capacity of 3,000 tents.

Additionally, in Kirkuk, UNHCR is constructing a new camp in Daquq district, with a 1,000-tent capacity and expanding additional camp capacity at Nazrawa and Laylan, which are now completely full. Work is also under way in Salah al-Din for a 1,000-tent camp at Tal al-Seebat.

UNHCR is also assessing and identifying other sites across northern Iraq in close consultation with authorities.

“Altogether, UNHCR is looking to set up camps in up to six locations across northern Iraq although progress depends on both the availability of land and of funding,” the spokesperson explained. “UNHCR’s overall appeal for \$584m for displaced people including Iraqi refugees in the region was only 38 per cent funded as of 2 August.”

Finding available land for the new camps has become a critical issue, fraught with problems. Land is identified and provided by the local authorities and assessed by UNHCR, other UN agencies and humanitarian partners for suitability. Problems ensue as many private landowners are unwilling to lease their plots while other properties may be unsuitable due to topography, frontline proximity or landmine contamination risks. Locations may also be deemed inappropriate in areas where displaced Iraqis might inflame ethnic, sectarian, religious or tribal tensions.

UNHCR leads the coordination and management response for protection, shelter, non-food items and camps. The agency currently has contingency stocks of tents and other relief items for 20,000 households country-wide.

UN human rights office concerned for the health of protestor in Israel

23 August – The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) today expressed concern over the deteriorating health of a 35-year-old Palestinian man who has been on a hunger strike against his administrative detention since 15 June, after having already completed his 14-and-a-half years prison sentence.

“After 70 days of hunger strike, [Bilal] Kayed is reported to be in a critical condition and doctors have informed him that he may suffer irreversible damage to his health,” OHCHR spokesperson Cécile Pouilly told the press at the regular briefing in Geneva today.

According to OHCHR, on 13 June, the day of Mr. Kayed’s scheduled release, a six-month administrative detention order was issued against him on unspecified security grounds and relying on ‘secret evidence.’

He was arrested in December 2001 and sentenced to 14 years and six months of imprisonment and was held in solitary confinement during his last nine months of imprisonment.

Ms. Pouilly further said that the UN human rights arm is also concerned at the situation of some 100 Palestinian detainees who are on hunger strike in solidarity with Mr. Kayed or to protest their own administrative detention or placement in isolation.

One such protestor, Ayyad Jamal Al-Hreini, on hunger strike since mid-July, was also re-arrested and held in administrative detention on 23 December 2015, ten days after having completed a three-year sentence, she noted.

On 20 August, Robert Piper, UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance and Development Aid in the occupied Palestinian



Cécile Pouilly, spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Photo: OHCHR

territory had also expressed concern about Mr. Kayed's deteriorating health.

The OHCHR spokesperson further said that Mr. Kayed is one of the at least 700 Palestinians believed to be held in administrative detention in Israel Prison Service facilities and that this is the highest number of such detainees at a given time since early 2008.

"We, once again, urge the Israeli authorities to end their practice of administrative detention and to either release immediately or promptly charge and prosecute all administrative detainees, with all the judicial guarantees required by international human rights law and standards," she concluded.

PODCAST: Preventing the young terrorist of tomorrow – former Taliban supporter says UN has key voice in global debate

23 August – When he was 19, Mubin Shaikh, believed that "you could change the world overnight, and you could do it through violence."

But the former-supporter of the Afghanistan-based Taliban extremist group, told *UN Radio* for its latest podcast, *The Lid is On*, that he realized a commitment to violence was a perversion of his religious faith that would be self-defeating, and he has some advice to young would-be terrorists today.

"What are you going to be left with, other than violence? I think they need to understand that they have a role to play," he said, adding: "Their role has to be constructive. If it's going to be destructive, then you are just going to be another statistic. All they're left in is a loop of violence that only ends in death."



Mubinoddin Shaikh, former Taliban radical, addresses the General Assembly High-level Thematic Conversation on Children and Youth affected by Violent Extremism. UN Photo/Kim Haughton

Now 40, the Canadian national, who was indoctrinated by the Taliban in Pakistan in the 1990s, is committed to what he calls a revival of classical or traditional Islam, and helping to re-educate young people vulnerable to jihadist ideology.

He was at United Nations Headquarters in early June, as a panellist in a day-long High-Level Thematic Conversation on Children and Youth affected by Violent Extremism convened by the General Assembly.

In January, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon presented to UN Member States a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, calling for a comprehensive approach addressing not only security issues, but "systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups," according to the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force.

Mr. Shaikh told *UN Radio* producer, Matthew Wells that the UN had an important and significant role in helping turn young people away from joining terrorist groups such as Da'esh (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL), Al-Qaida, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab.

"The countries that are most affected, their representatives are here" he said.

He added that the UN provided "a forum itself, for young people to come and speak, to hear what people at this level are saying [...] People at the United Nations saying, Islamophobia's a problem, don't just pick on Muslims [...] If they hear this at that level, then it's easier for them to disseminate it at lower levels."

Mr. Shaikh described how he rejoiced as the first plane hit New York's World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, but then fundamentally re-thought his entire relationship with his faith and jihadism, following the attacks.

He went on to become a counter-terrorism operative for the Canadian government, and is currently studying for a PhD at the University of Liverpool, in the United Kingdom.

At Security Council, Ban calls for eradicating weapons of mass destruction 'once and for all'



A wide view of the Security Council open debate on the topic "Challenges in addressing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, their means of delivery and related materials." UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

23 August – Recalling that eliminating weapons of mass destruction was one of the founding principles of the United Nations and was in fact the subject of the first resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today stressed the need to seriously refocus attention on nuclear disarmament.

"I call on all States to focus on one overriding truth: the only sure way to prevent the human, environmental and existential destruction these weapons can cause, is by eradicating [these weapons] once and for all," said Mr. Ban in his remarks at the Security Council open debate on 'non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.'

"We – the international community – must ensure the disarmament and non-proliferation framework is universally and completely implemented, and is resilient and versatile enough to grapple with the changing environment," he added.

In his remarks, Mr. Ban said the success in preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction offers some comfort and that multilateral treaties, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention, and instruments, including Security Council resolution 1540, are "robust and tested."

Adopted in 2004, resolution 1540 affirms that the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and their means of delivery constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

But the Secretary-General also pointed out that the challenges to the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture are growing. He noted that technological advances have made means of production and methods of delivery of these weapons easier and more accessible.

"Vicious non-State actors that target civilians for carnage are actively seeking chemical, biological and nuclear weapons," he stressed.

He said that it is particularly disappointing that progress on eliminating nuclear weapons has descended into fractious deadlock, underscoring that arguments justifying nuclear weapons, such as those used during the Cold War, "were morally, politically and practically wrong thirty years ago, and they are wrong now".

Recalling the Security Council's convening of the historic summit on non-proliferation and adoption of resolution 1887 (2009) in which it emphasized its primary responsibility to address nuclear threats and its willingness to take action, Mr. Ban said the global community now expects the Council to demonstrate the same leadership on the subject, to build on resolution 1887 and to develop further initiatives to bring about a world free of weapons of mass destruction.

While noting that more needs to be done to "bridge the divide" within the international community, the UN chief said that it was encouraging that all UN Member States agree that the collective efforts must complement and strengthen the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, including the NPT, which is the only treaty-based commitment to nuclear disarmament and has been a strong barrier against nuclear proliferation for nearly 50 years.

Biological attacks could be much more devastating

Speaking on the threat of biological weapons, the Secretary General said that in the wake of serious outbreaks of Ebola, MERS and yellow fever, he is “very concerned” that the international community is not adequately prepared to prevent or respond to a biological attack.

“The impact and consequences of a biological attack on a civilian target could far exceed those of a chemical or radiological attack,” he highlighted, stating that the investment in the international architecture dealing with these different types of weapons of mass destruction is not commensurate with their possible effects.

“For example, there is no multilateral prevention and verification agency for biological weapons, as there is for nuclear and chemical threats and risks,” he added.

The Secretary-General also called on the Security Council to consider how to strengthen resolution 1540 to ensure that non-State actors cannot acquire these horrific weapons.

“For twelve years, this resolution has tried to provide a barrier to the threat and risk of weapons of mass destruction use by non-state actors, which is a very real threat,” recalled Mr. Ban.

He called on the Council to use the open debate to be proactive in ensuring the resolution continues to be fit for purpose.

People must also be protected from online attacks

Turning to the new global threats emerging from the misuse of science and technology, and the power of globalization, the Secretary-General said that the nexus between these emerging technologies and weapons of mass destruction needs close examination and action.

“Information and communication technologies, artificial intelligence, 3D printing and synthetic biology will bring profound changes to our everyday lives and benefits to millions of people,” he noted, but cautioned that “their potential for misuse could also bring destruction.”

As a starting point, Mr. Ban said the international community must step up to expand common ground for the peaceful use of cyberspace and, particularly, the intersection between cyberspace and critical infrastructure.

Expressing that people now live a significant portion of their lives “online,” they must be protected from online attacks, just as effectively as they are protected from physical attacks.

“Disarmament and non-proliferation instruments are only as successful as Member States’ capacity to implement them,” he noted, encouraging the members of the Council to devise effective solutions so that all states can fully implement their disarmament and non-proliferation commitments.

UN rights chief 'deeply dismayed' at execution of 36 people in Iraq



UN Photo

23 August – The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, has expressed deep dismay at the execution of 36 people in Iraq in relation to a 2014 massacre during which hundreds of military cadets were killed.

“[The High Commissioner] urged the authorities to ensure that any trials conducted in connection with the massacre respected due process and international fair trial rather than be fuelled by vengeance,” Cécile Pouilly, a spokesperson for OHCHR, told the press today at a regular briefing in Geneva.

“Unfortunately, this was not the case,” she added.

In June 2014, some 1,700 cadets at the Camp Speicher military base were killed in an attack by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, Da'esh) fighters.

In the aftermath of the killings, the UN human rights chief had expressed that the “magnitude and brutality of the Camp Speicher massacre was exceptional” and that it was important to respond to the plight of the survivors and families of the victims.

At the briefing today, the OHCHR spokesperson said that the executions, carried out on Sunday, were particularly worrying given serious due process concerns and fair trial shortcomings.

“The individuals who have been executed were convicted only on the basis of information provided by secret informants or by confessions allegedly extracted under duress,” she noted, adding that the claims of 19 defendants that they were tortured to induce confessions were never investigated.

Furthermore, she said that the Court-appointed lawyer who represented the defendants, did not intervene during the proceedings, and made only a three-minute statement before the verdicts were delivered.

According to OHCHR, an estimated 1,200 individuals remain on death row in Iraq.

Urging the authorities to halt all imminent executions, Ms. Pouilly called on them to “urgently conduct a comprehensive review of the criminal justice system in the country.”

UN rights office expresses concern over death of member of opposition party in Gambia



Street scene in downtown Banjul, The Gambia. Photo: IRIN/Nicholas Reader (file)

23 August – The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has deplored the death in custody of Ebrima Solo Kurumah, a member of the opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), last Saturday, a spokesperson for the Office said.

Mr. Kurumah was among 30 members of the UDP who were imprisoned, in April, following protests against the death of Solo Sandeng, the Chairman of UDP's youth wing. Mr. Sandeng had also died while in custody.

OHCHR had earlier expressed concerns over the imprisonment and that there had been no proper investigation into allegations of excessive use of force in the context of the demonstrations.

Speaking at a regular press briefing in Geneva, Cécile Pouilly said that according to reports, Mr. Kurumah passed away after he was taken to a hospital for a surgical operation.

He had allegedly been denied medical help on several occasions while in detention. Additionally, there are reports that other detainees have also been denied medical care in recent months.

“We urge the authorities to investigate the death in State custody of Mr. Sandeng and Mr. Kurumah,” said Ms. Pouilly, urged them to also investigate allegations that detainees are denied access to medical care.

China’s poverty alleviation must be accompanied by accountability – UN rights expert



Special Rapporteur Philip Alston. UN Photo/Loey Felipe

23 August – China has made huge progress in poverty alleviation, but needs meaningful accountability mechanisms that citizens can use when their rights are violated in the context of development-related activities, a United Nations human rights expert said today.

“China’s achievements in alleviating extreme poverty in recent years, and in meeting highly ambitious targets for improving social well-being, have been extraordinary,” said the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, said in a news release as he wrapped up his fact-finding trip to the country.

He noted that China’s President, Xi Jinping, has promised to eliminate extreme poverty by 2020, so that no one should be left behind. This meant lifting 55.75 million rural people out of ‘extreme poverty,’ defined by reference to an income-based standard of \$2.30 per day or 2,800 yuan per year.

However, an important part of the human rights dimension of the challenge has so far been neglected, Mr. Alston pointed out.

“China has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and has consistently emphasized its commitment to guaranteeing those rights,” he said.

For these rights to be treated like human rights, rather than broad development goals, three essential steps need to be taken, he said. First, the recognition of the rights in legislative or other form, second, the creation of institutions to promote their realization, and third the provision of accountability mechanisms to ensure redress for violations, he noted.

Most of the rights are not specifically recognized in legislation, and no institutions exist that promote these rights as human rights. But the biggest challenge relates to mechanisms for redress and accountability, which are an indispensable component of a human rights approach, he said.

“China has much to be proud of in the field of poverty alleviation. However, if it is to effectively ensure the implementation of its economic and social rights obligations, it needs to adopt more robust mechanisms for citizen involvement and for governmental accountability,” he noted.

During his nine-day visit to China, the human rights expert met and engaged with the central government and with local governments, non-governmental organizations, representatives of international organizations, and academic experts in Beijing and in Yunnan province.

The Special Rapporteur will present a comprehensive report with his full findings and recommendations to the Human Rights Council in June 2017.

Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

Security Council condemns recent terrorist attack in Turkey



Inside the Islahiye camp for Syrian refugees, in Gaziantep Province, Turkey. Photo: UNICEF/Ayberk Yurtsever

23 August – The United Nations Security Council has strongly condemned the “heinous and cowardly” terrorist attack at a wedding ceremony in the city of Gaziantep in Turkey on 20 August, during which at least 54 people were killed and over 200 injured.

In a press statement issued yesterday afternoon, the members of the Council also condemned the terrorist attacks that took place over the last week in Turkey, during which several Turkish police officers and civilians were killed. They expressed their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the Turkish Government and they wished a speedy and full recovery to those who were injured.

Reaffirming that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security, the Council underlined the need to bring perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism to justice and urged all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with Turkey and all other relevant authorities in this regard.

The Council also stressed that those responsible for these killings should be held accountable and urged all States to cooperate actively with all relevant authorities in this regard.