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UN Secretary-General in Colombia to witness signing of historic peace accord

26 September – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has arrived in the Colombian city of Cartagena, which is the centre of a historic signing, today, of the peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP), which ended more than 50 years of conflict.

The agreement is the end of four years of negotiation between the parties in Havana, Cuba, and the mark of an end to one of the world's oldest armed conflicts.

Last week, Mr. Ban hailed the Colombia peace accord as a powerful message of hope to the world, at a time when other places are troubled by armed conflict. He was speaking on Wednesday 21 September 2016, at a symbolic event held on the International Day of Peace, after President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia presented to him – before the UN Security Council – documents of the peace accord.
Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly last week, President Juan Manuel Santos declared that his nation was finally at peace with an accord that can serve as a precedent for the rest of the world.

“The bells of peace are ringing in Colombia and their echo is heard by all nations represented in this room,” he told the Assembly on the second day of its annual general debate.

In an earlier statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson following the 24 August 2016 deal, Mr. Ban pledged ongoing support of the United Nations system to the two sides as they mustered the “equally determined and exemplary effort” that would be required to implement the agreement.

**UN vital for survival of small States in volatile world, Singapore tells General Assembly**

26 September – In a world of increased uncertainty and volatility, with sluggish growth, growing xenophobia and rising nationalism and protectionism, the United Nations is essential for the survival and prosperity of small states, Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan told the General Assembly today.

“We are usually at the receiving end of the decisions and actions of large powers. Fortunately, the General Assembly affirms the principle that all nations large and small have an equal stake and equal right to participate in shaping the discourse on global issues, he said on the last day of the Assembly’s annual general debate.

“In an uncertain world, small States have to work much harder just to stay afloat. Small boats on a rough sea will be tossed and turned much more than a tanker with heavy ballast. For our survival and prosperity, small states have to stay open and connected to the world. But our very openness makes us vulnerable to external shocks and threats,” he said.

Mr. Balakrishnan stressed that as the world becomes more and more interdependent, no country can succeed on its own and to achieve global security and prosperity it is essential to work with each other to seek win-win outcomes with all countries benefitting from partnerships and economic cooperation in peace and stability.

He highlighted three elements as crucial for the survival and prosperity of small states: a rules-based multilateral system, international partnership and cooperation, and sustainable development.

“Ultimately, small States need the United Nations to provide the framework for building partnerships, promoting development and pursuing peace and security within a rules-based system,” he concluded, citing the significant contributions these states have already made by building consensus and finding solutions on key global issues like climate change.
Syria: Joint UN-Red Crescent relief convoy reaches besieged cities for first time in five months

26 September – The United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) have delivered life-saving food aid to 60,000 people under siege in four Syrian towns, their first supplies since April, but extreme concern persists for 250,000 people trapped in Aleppo, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) reported today.

“This convoy has brought extraordinary relief for 60,000 people who are in dire need of food and medical supplies, and have been cut off from humanitarian access for five months,” WFP Syria Country Director Jakob Kern said of yesterday’s deliveries to Madaya and Zabadani in Rural Damascus and Foaa and Kefraya in Rural Idlib.

WFP sent in 45 trucks carrying food rations and wheat flour as part of a joint UN-SARC convoy, with enough rice, lentils, bulgur wheat, vegetable oil, sugar, salt, beans and chick peas to feed 60,000 people for one month. WFP also delivered to Madaya and Zabadani a three-month supply of specialized nutritious products for the prevention of malnutrition for 250 children.

“Elsewhere in Syria, we are extremely concerned about the more than 250,000 people trapped in eastern Aleppo city who are cut off from food, water, medicine, and other essential supplies,” Mr. Kern said.

“We call on all parties to this terrible conflict to immediately open transport routes that allow unconditional, unimpeded, sustained and safe humanitarian access to those in eastern Aleppo and every family across Syria that needs our support,” he added.

Last week, a convoy reached the besieged area of Moadamiyet al Sham in Rural Damascus for the first time since July, delivering WFP food for 35,000 people for one month, as well as other humanitarian aid.

An additional interagency convoy went to Al Wa’er in Homs, providing WFP food for 37,000 people and wheat flour for 70,000 for one month. A third convoy to Talbiseh in Rural Homs brought enough WFP wheat flour for 84,000 people for one month, as well as other food.

Across Syria, WFP provides food assistance to more than four million people every month. Thirty per cent of this food is delivered through cross-border, cross-line and air operations to areas that are not reachable through regular road deliveries.

Last month UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien called on all parties to immediately lift sieges of civilians in Syria, including Madaya, Deir-ez-Zor, Douma, Foah and Kefraya, to end indiscriminate attacks on civilian-populated areas and civilian infrastructure, and to take all necessary measures to ensure protection for all civilians as required under international humanitarian and human rights law.
UNESCO unveils video on comprehensive sexuality education for young people

26 September – The United Nations cultural agency today released a new video that outlines how comprehensive sexuality education helps young people develop the knowledge and skills to make conscious, healthy and responsible choices about relationships and sexuality.

The Being a Young Person video, released by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), outlines the vital role that comprehensive sexuality education plays in ensuring the sexual and reproductive health of all young people. It is recognized as an age-appropriate, culturally relevant approach to teaching about sexuality and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgemental information, UNESCO said in a press release.

The video’s release comes after a high-level event at the UN General Assembly in New York, on ‘Improving the Sexual and Reproductive Health of the Adolescent Girl: The Role of First Ladies.’

The event, which was initiated by the Organization of African First Ladies Against HIV/AIDS, brought together heads of State and Government, First Ladies, heads of UN agencies and civil society organizations to increase acceptance and catalyse action on expanding access to sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents across Africa.

Speaking at the event, which was held on 21 September, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova highlighted that comprehensive sexuality education is a foundation for all HIV prevention, and part of every young person’s journey to adulthood.

“It reduces sexually transmitted infections, HIV and unintended pregnancy, improves self-esteem, changing attitudes and both gender and social norms,” the Director-General said.

An early preview of the video was seen by ministers and representatives from government, development and civil society organizations at a high-level dialogue on the sidelines of the AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa, in July. The meeting marked progress since the 2013 Eastern and Southern Africa Ministerial Commitment, in which 20 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa committed to scaling up comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services for young people.

A Global Review conducted by UNESCO in 2015 revealed that comprehensive sexuality education leads to improved sexual and reproductive health, resulting in the reduction of sexually transmitted infections, HIV and unintended pregnancy. Comprehensive sexuality education not only promotes gender equality and equitable social norms, but has a positive impact on safer sexual behaviours, delaying sexual debut and increasing condom use, UNESCO said.
World leaders spotlight 2030 Agenda, climate action at UN
General Assembly’s annual debate

26 September – Speaking on behalf of Peter Thomson, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, one of the 193-member body’s Vice-Presidents, Durga Prasad Bhattarai, Ambassador of Nepal, said he was encouraged by the fact that many UN Member States have already embedded the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their national plans and policies.

“We began with a moving SDG moment, which reminded us of how transformative the SDGs will be and how urgently action is now required to implement them,” he said in closing remarks at the closing of the Assembly’s annual general debate, the forum where world leaders gather to present their policies the theme of the session – which this year is SDG implementation -- as well as other critical global issues.

“Leaders recalled and reaffirmed the spirit and the principles of the UN Charter and confirmed their faith in the central role of UN in international cooperation,” he added.

He also welcomed the important discussions on antimicrobial resistance, a phenomenon that threatens millions of lives around the world as well as progress across the SDGs.

He also welcomed the increased momentum on the ratification of the Paris Agreement on climate change and noted that ratifications covering only a further 7.5 per cent of global emissions to see the Agreement enter into force.

Also welcoming the adoption of the New York Declaration at last week’s Summit for Refugees and Migrants, he said that high-level event initiated a process that the General Assembly President will take forward during this session, with a view to adopting two global compacts, respectively, on migrants and on refugees, in 2018.

Turning to the complex and critical humanitarian crises in different parts of the world, said: “I [join] the Secretary General and Member States in condemning the unacceptable attacks on a UN aid convoy in Aleppo and in calling for a renewed effort from global and regional powers to find a peaceful political solution.”

He also highlighted the reform of the UN Security Council, raised by many Member States as important to posture the global organization to address new challenges across the world, and said that the emphasis placed by world leaders on the protection and promotion of human rights is very important.

Further in his remarks, the Acting President expressed that the engagement of world leaders demonstrated, once again, the unique nature of the General Debate and added that it was “the embodiment of the equality of nations and provides Member States with an opportunity to advance our collective pursuit of solutions to global challenges through dialogue and cooperation.”

In conclusion, he also expressed appreciation to the valuable leadership of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon during his term and said: “His statement [opening the debate] was a testimony both to the work he has done these past nine years and the scale of the challenges his successor will face.”

Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson also reviewed several of the key themes that emerged over the session, which began
Monday, 19 September. He welcomed the many statements of solidarity with refugees and migrants and was heartened by efforts to mobilize against xenophobia. He recalled the concerns of many Member States for the need to support countries of origin, transit and destination.

“The New York Declaration has given a new structure to work regarding refugees and migrants,” he said, expressing the hope that the UN would send a signal of everyone’s equal value. The conflict in Syria was high on the agenda of many States, and it was clear that more needed be done to stop fighting and provide humanitarian assistance. The suffering in Syria had gone on far too long and the dangers to the wider region are enormous, he said.

Commending efforts by the General Assembly and Security Council to accept the notion of sustaining peace, he urged Member States to think more in terms of conflict prevention and post-conflict work.

**UN agency highlights potential of agriculture to help address climate change and antimicrobial resistance**

26 September – The role of agriculture should go beyond just generating food to help address global challenges such as climate change and antimicrobial resistance, the head of United Nations agriculture agency stressed today.

“Agriculture is at the very heart” of a recent series of ground-breaking international agreements, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), José Graziano da Silva told ministers, and representatives of government, private sector and civil society attending the biannual meeting of the agency’s Committee on Agriculture, according to a FAO news release.

“Sustainable agriculture is paramount to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to sustain natural resources, to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change, to achieve healthier food systems and to build resilience against crises and natural disasters,” he said.

While past developments in agriculture have led to major improvements in productivity, he continued, “progress has been uneven” and that “greater emphasis must be placed on the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability.”

The Director-General pointed to growing international recognition that agriculture can play a transformative role in addressing the impacts of climate change.

Countries are set to gather for the next Conference of States Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), informally known as ‘COP 22,’ in Morocco in November to put into motion their pledges on climate change, and FAO “stands ready to assist governments, especially of developing countries to have access to international resources that are available to finance these actions,” he said.

Mr. Graziano da Silva also noted that the “role of agriculture goes beyond generating food and income,” referring to FAO’s recent commitment at the UN General Assembly to work closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) to curb antimicrobial resistance.

“We at FAO believe that antibiotics and other antimicrobials should be used in agriculture to cure diseases and to alleviate suffering. Only under strict circumstances they could be used to prevent an imminent threat of infection,” he said.

Mr. Graziano da Silva told the Committee’s opening session today that in 2014-15, FAO supported 245 initiatives in 89 countries to promote sustainable agricultural production practices based on participatory approaches.
The Committee meets every two years to assess the current state of affairs in world agriculture and provide guidance to FAO on its program of work.

On International Day, UN renews call for global elimination of nuclear weapons

26 September – The world faces growing nuclear dangers and tensions, yet progress in multilateral nuclear disarmament has come to a “standstill,” United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared today, reiterating a call for complete global nuclear disarmament as the international community marks the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

“Let us pledge to work for the total elimination of nuclear weapons with urgency and a sense of collective purpose. Our very survival depends upon it,” Mr. Ban said in a message to mark the Day, observed annually on 26 September.

Noting that nuclear disarmament is one of the founding principles of the UN, the Secretary-General said that it was also the objective of the first General Assembly resolution.

“Disarmament is in our DNA,” he stated, adding that he has been proud to advance the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, such as by launching, in 2008, a Five Point Proposal on Nuclear Disarmament to spur Member States to greater action.

There are many paths to a world free of nuclear weapons. What matters is that all States act now, without delay, to fulfil their disarmament and non-proliferation commitments Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson

“Sadly, many countries continue to include nuclear deterrence in their security doctrines. But recent developments have shown that nuclear weapons do not ensure peace and security. Rather, their development and possession has become a major source of international tension,” the UN chief said.

“As we scan the global horizon, we face growing nuclear dangers. Progress in multilateral nuclear disarmament has come to a standstill,” he added.

The Secretary-General noted that tens of billions of dollars have been pledged to maintain and upgrade nuclear weapon systems, and one country – the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea – has “repeatedly defied the norm against nuclear testing and the will of the international community in the reckless pursuit of nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities.”

He added that there are growing divisions on the future of multilateral nuclear disarmament. The next review cycle of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons begins in 2017, and “the world cannot afford another round of inaction,” Mr. Ban said.

A landmark international treaty opened for signature in 1968, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons entered into force in 1970, and was extended indefinitely on 11 May 1995. Its objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament. It represents the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to the goal of disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States.

“There are many paths to a world free of nuclear weapons. What matters is that all States act now, without delay, to fulfil their disarmament and non-proliferation commitments,” the Secretary-General emphasized.
In related news, at a high-level informal plenary meeting in the General Assembly today to commemorate and promote the Day, Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson highlighted that next February, the world will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, known as the Tlatelolco Treaty.

“This landmark treaty was the first to prohibit nuclear weapons in a densely populated region. It has served as a model and inspiration for future nuclear-weapon-free zones,” said Mr. Eliasson, who spoke on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Noting that the international community marked the twentieth anniversary of the opening for signature of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) this past week, Mr. Eliasson reiterated that the Secretary-General strongly supports all efforts to uphold the international norm against nuclear testing, pending the Treaty’s entry into force.

In addition, Mr. Eliasson noted that one day before the anniversary, the Security Council adopted a resolution in support of the Treaty, with the Secretary-General acknowledging the commitment of nuclear-weapon States to uphold their moratorium on nuclear tests.

“But this resolution is not a substitute for the entry into force of the CTBT. Rather, it is a wake-up call for the need to accelerate our efforts towards the full implementation of the Treaty,” he said.

Adopted by the General Assembly under resolution 50 (1996), the CTBT – which bans all nuclear explosions for both civilian and military purposes – has been signed by 183 States thus far, and 166 States have deposited their instruments of ratification.

The Treaty will enter into force 180 days after the date of deposit of the instruments of ratification by all States listed in its Annex 2. Of the 44 States listed in Annex 2, 41 have signed and 36 have both signed and ratified the Treaty, including several nuclear weapons States.

Of the 44 States included in Annex 2, all have signed with the exceptions of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, India and Pakistan. Five of the 44 Annex 2 States have signed but not ratified the Treaty: China, Egypt, Iran, Israel and the United States.

The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons was established by the UN General Assembly in 2013 in a resolution calling for the “urgent commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament of a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer and use or threat of use, and to provide for their destruction.”

Today’s high-level meeting was convened by the President of the General Assembly in accordance with Assembly resolution 70/34 of 7 December 2015.
UNESCO chief condemns murder of Jordanian writer

26 September – The head of the United Nations agency tasked with defending press freedom today expressed indignation at the killing of Jordanian writer Nahed Hattar.

“I condemn the murder of Nahed Hattar,” declared Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). “This crime constitutes a grave attack on freedom of expression and affects Jordanian society as a whole,” she added.

Nahed Hattar was shot on 25 September, outside a court where he was to face charges for sharing on social media a controversial cartoon critical of religious extremists, according to the agency.

The Director-General of UNESCO issues statements on the killing of media workers in line with resolution 29 adopted by UNESCO Member States in 1997, entitled “Condemnation of Violence against Journalists.”

UN-backed programme found to improve working conditions in global garment factories

26 September – A new study has found that a United Nations-backed programme aiming to promote competitiveness and improve the working conditions of more than one million workers in garment factories across seven developing countries has shown significant gains in both quality of life for workers and profitability for businesses.

The programme – called Better Work – was established in 2007 by the UN’s International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank Group’s International Finance Corporation. Currently engaging 1,300 factories that employ more than 1.6 million workers, the programme operates in seven countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Haiti, Indonesia, Jordan, Nicaragua and Viet Nam.

According an independent review by Tufts University, the Better Work programme moves factories away from practices leading to long working hours, extremely low pay, dismissal threats, or abuse of probationary contracts. Workers are also seeing an increase in their weekly take-home pay and are less and less concerned with excessive overtime and poor wages.

“Evidence of a win-win outcome – improving working conditions while boosting profit margins – has to date largely been anecdotal. Tufts University’s impact assessment has made significant strides in establishing evidence of this relationship,” said Professor Drusilla Brown, lead author of the report.

The review also notes progress in closing the gender pay gap, particularly among garment factories receiving Better Work advisory services in Haiti, Nicaragua and Viet Nam.

ILO noted that the programme has made significant progress in diminishing coercive labour practices and limiting harassment and verbal abuse. In Jordan, reports of sexual harassment fell by 18 per cent, while the incidence of workers feeling fearful in the workplace also declined markedly.
Researchers also found that Better Work’s Supervisory Skills Training is an effective strategy for improving working conditions, as well as for empowering women in the industry. The analysis showed that production lines overseen by Supervisory Skills-trained female line supervisors increased factory productivity by 22 per cent, when compared with lines overseen by supervisors who had not yet received such training.

The report concluded that the gains in working conditions do not come at the expense of business performance. The research established a direct link between better working conditions and higher profit firms. Across all factories tracked in Viet Nam, after four years of participation with Better Work, average profitability increased by 25 per cent.

The Better Work programme is supported by Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade); Denmark (Ministry of Foreign Affairs); the Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs); Switzerland (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs); and the United States (US Department of Labor).

**Togo, at UN, calls for enhancing efforts of small countries to combat spread of terrorism**

26 September – Addressing the General Assembly today, Kokou Kpayedo, the Permanent Representative of Togo to the United Nations, reiterated his country’s voluntary commitment in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and stressed that enhanced cooperation in responding to security threats and ensuring reform of the Security Council are needed to secure their wide implementation.

“Togo, pilot country for the objectives of sustainable development, volunteered during the political High-Level Political Forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council in July, to take part in the Progress Report of the integration of the Agenda in national strategies and programs for development,” said Mr. Kpayedo, noting that at that time, his delegations had demonstrated an advanced implementation roadmap, and also shared the significant progress made in the implementation of key actions.

The SDGs should help transform the world by giving priority to the most vulnerable groups such as women, youth, children, populations affected by conflict and disasters, migrants and refugees, he continued, adding: “No development program can succeed and remain sustainable if the national context in which it must be implemented is not peaceful and stable.” As such, Togo is working to eradicate poverty and hunger, which he considered “the roots of insecurity and terrorism.”

An effective fight against terrorism requires States to continue to work together and further strengthening of cooperation between their competent technical and information-sharing services. “It also requires that the most affluent countries agree to support [small] States such as Togo, which do not have the resources to develop mechanisms and appropriate means of countering terrorism,” he added, noting that his country will host the special Summit of the African Union on the security and maritime safety and development in Africa.

“The goal is to agree on a joint statement to better prevent and cope with insecurity at sea and promoting sustainable and inclusive development of the blue economy, in line with [the 2030 Agenda] and the Paris Agreement,” he said.
In General Assembly, Denmark calls for greater UN efficiency and transparency

26 September – Confronting the daunting challenges that face the world, the United Nations must improve its performance to transform its ambitious agendas on sustainable development and climate change into “real change” that benefits all people, Denmark told the General Assembly today.

“As the people's organization, the United Nations needs to do better to foster trust, transparency, and efficiency,” Permanent Representative Ib Petersen told the Assembly’s annual General Debate.

“If the UN is to remain a relevant and legitimate organization for peace, development and human rights, we must continue on this path of increased openness and transparency. This is in the shared interest of all Member States,” he said.

But he said the UN’s recent record gave cause for optimism, based on the adoption of Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, the successful conclusion of the Paris Climate Agreement last December, and last week’s Summit for Refugees and Migrants in New York.

Onus is on ‘us’ to ensure implementation of 2030 Agenda, Tanzanian Minister tells UN

26 September – Highlighting at the United Nations today his country’s initiatives to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation of Tanzania emphasized the importance of collective efforts at local, national and international levels to achieve the goals in a timely manner.

“We have integrated the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in our National Development Plans and Strategies, and in collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders, have taken various steps to ensure effective implementation at the national level,” said Augustine Phillip Mahiga, in his address to the General Assembly, and noted national efforts to increase the welfare of all Tanzanians and to ensure that “no one is left behind.”

In his address, Mr. Mahiga also underscored the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment, noting especially that Tanzania has continued to take actions to ensure more representation of women in decision-making, as illustrated by their increasing numbers in its Parliament.

He also highlighted the importance of combatting corruption in the attainment of the Global Goals and called on developed countries to ensure that their “investors and multinational companies [are] accountable by paying due taxes [and] returning assets and funds stolen from developing countries and hidden in their countries so that they can contribute in financing our development endeavours.”

Citing the importance of environment and the need for effective implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Minister informed the global body that Tanzania was among the first countries to submit their Intended Nationally
Determined Contributions (INDCs) on both adaptation and mitigation under the Agreement.

Further, drawing the Assembly’s attention to global terrorism, Mr. Mahiga said that his country cooperating with the international community to address the global terrorist threat as well as spoke of national efforts through inaction of laws and frameworks to counter the threat of violent extremism.

Concluding his address, the Minister also welcomed the new steps to bring in more transparency in the selection of the next UN Secretary-General and said that the process should respect geographical rotational principle and take into account gender balance.

“The [selection] of the Secretary-General this year will send a clear signal globally that permanent members of Security Council are ready and willing to undertake the long overdue reforms of the Security Council,” he noted.

In his address, the Minister also spoke of the importance of youth, employment and education as well as of the challenges brought on by drug trafficking.

**Palau has already made the choice for a better future, Permanent Representative tells UN debate**

26 September – Addressing the General Assembly, Palau’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations underlined today the urgency of addressing challenges such as threats from climate change, global conflict, issues of migrants and refugees, violent extremism, antimicrobial resistance and nuclear weapons.

Making particular reference to the impacts of climate change, Caleb Otto said the country participated actively at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process and was the second country in the world to have ratified the Paris Agreement.

“We are encouraged by the 127 other nations who have signed the Agreement and are confident that by the end of the year, the Agreement will being to work for all of us,” Mr. Otto said in his address.

Noting that 14 years, the time from now until 2030, is a short period within which to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), he stressed an urgent need implement the global development agenda to transform the world.

He also informed the General Assembly of steps taken at the national level to implement the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda, as well as underlined the importance of genuine and durable partnerships for their global success.

Mr. Otto further expressed particular appreciation for the leadership of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his support of and focus towards the Pacific small island developing States and his stewardship of the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda and other achievements of the UN.
African island nations at UN spotlight ‘blue’ economy, ocean’s ‘transformative power’ as key to survival

26 September – Addressing the United Nations General Assembly, two small island nations in Africa today stressed that among the many challenges they face, harnessing the transformative power of the seas and building the ocean-based economy is of fundamental importance for their countries’ survival and sustainable growth.

“The survival, the economic growth and development of our countries depends on the oceans, to which we are inextricably connected,” the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communities of Cabo Verde, Luis Filipe Tavares, told the Assembly’s annual debate. “The ocean-based economy is therefore of fundamental importance for the development that we want to be sustainable.”

For this reason, Cabo Verde, a country off the northwest coast of Africa, calls for a robust and transparent international legal framework as a sine qua non condition for the preservation and sustained use of marine resources, he explained.

He also said that the challenge facing a small and vulnerable country like his “goes beyond” national capacity to handle and calls for a more coordinated and predictable support from the international community, in particular the UN system.

“For us, the fulfilment of the [2030] Agenda for Sustainable Development implies enhancing the means of implementation, particularly financing, technology transfer, capacity building, and participation in international trade,” he said.

“Furthermore, we will need to develop the capacity to follow up and implement a system to monitor national and regional policies, of which the United Nations System cannot be unaware,” he added.

In their development process, SIDS face significant environmental, economic, and social vulnerabilities, including the huge costs of modernizing and transforming and their limited capacity to attract foreign direct investments, he said.

Also addressing the Assembly was Marie-Louise Potter, Seychelles’ Permanent Representative to the UN, who stressed the pertinent role Sustainable Development Goal 14 plays in people’s lives.

“As a champion of the blue economy initiative, which is directed at reinforcing marine related activities for sustainability purposes, Seychelles recognizes that our oceans present an abundance of untapped opportunities for sustainable growth,” she said.

“It is therefore imperative to highlight that the blue economy, are synonymous with the global action to harness the power of the oceans as a tool for transformation,” she added.

Seychelles, located off Africa’s east coast, contributes to this discourse through the “blue bonds” initiative and “debt-swap agreement.”
Caribbean leaders, at UN Assembly, decry new financial rules; stress UN role in development

26 September – Declaring that Caribbean countries are being treated “as if they are hell on earth” due to new financial rules against tax havens, Bahamian Foreign Minister Frederick Mitchell mounted the podium of the United Nations General Assembly today to denounce the “immoral” withdrawal of normal banking services that inflict hardship on ordinary citizens.

“This problem must be solved by those who imposed the regulations. It is a moral imperative,” he told the Assembly’s annual general debate, reprising a theme already highlighted by fellow leaders from the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) last week.

He noted that banks in the developed world, principally the United States, are refusing to cash the cheques of some Caribbean banks because they say the risk of policing the CARICOM banks on compliance to the new rules is too high and the business they get is too low, stripping the services from across the Caribbean.

“These Caribbean territories described in their tourist brochures as paradises, are being treated as if they are hell on earth by dint of these new financial rules, using pejorative expressions like tax havens, and imposing unfair rules and sanctions on these societies, which may prevent valuable remittances to folks back home or prevent paying the school fees of Bahamian students abroad,” he said.

Stressing that no CARICOM country shields anyone involved in unlawful behaviour and that all applicable agreements are complied with in connection with money laundering and unlawful tax havens, Mr. Mitchell called the attacks on the Bahamas and CARICOM “inaccurate and unfair” and those in the press “simply reprehensible and violations of international norms.”

The developed States argue that the fact that Caribbean countries are bankers for those seeking to take advantage of tax competition is somehow immoral because it robs the developed world of legitimate revenue, but this is not true since evidence shows that wealth accumulated offshore goes back to the developed nations, he said.

“We would argue that another moral argument is that if the societies of the Caribbean collapse because of the over regulation, then the result of the destruction of millions of families would be the greater moral wrong,” he added.

Foreign Minister Wilfred Elrington of Belize endorsed other CARICOM delegations in their pleas for “urgent relief from the deleterious consequences of the decisions of global banks to withdraw banking services.

“We keep upgrading our regulatory frameworks to ensure strict compliance with all relevant laws and best practices of the banking and financial sectors internationally,” he said.

He also underscored the centrality of the UN as a uniting force for championing the common good, declaring that its leadership remains central to international peace and security, development, and the rule of law.

“The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is truly a historical milestone for the entire world,” he added. “In a country as small as Belize, in a world as big as ours, we are all citizens of planet earth, big or small. The policies we devise at any level must be reflective of this reality.
“It is up to us leaders, working together and shouldering our respective sovereign responsibilities, to guarantee that every nation, large and small, and every individual man woman or child, shall have a say in our noble endeavours for a more just, equitable, and secure world.”

Trinidad and Tobago Foreign Minister Dennis Moses focused his address on the UN’s role in attaining the 2030 Agenda and tackling other challenges facing the world.

“From the existential hazard posed by unmitigated climate change, to the insidious threat of violent extremism and terrorism; the crises of forced displacement and the spread of infectious diseases and illnesses such as Ebola, Chikungunya and Zika, it is clear that the challenges of our time far exceed the limits of geography and demography, and therefore diminishes the efficacy of unilateral responses,” he told the Assembly.

“However, as grave as the threats we collectively face, what is even more compelling is the opportunity presented to our United Nations to chart a course of meaningful and universal growth and prosperity, by deepening our partnership and cooperation,” he stated.

He called climate change “one of the defining challenges of our time […] Notwithstanding our miniscule contribution to absolute global emissions, for small island developing states such as Trinidad and Tobago, unmitigated climate change poses an existential threat,” he added.

Foreign Minister Niermala Badrising of Suriname also stressed the primacy of the UN in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and combating climate change.

“As we continue our deliberations and take decisions on pertinent issues with respect to the global agenda, the world finds itself at elevated levels of crises: financially, economically, environmentally and politically,” she said, calling this the opposite of what is needed for sustainable development for all, namely peace, stability, democracy and universal access to the planet’s resources.

She voiced concerned at the multitude of challenges and threats facing the world in the political, security, economic and social arena, including the global recession and economic slowdown, which have worsened inequalities, causing increased violence, political instability and social deterioration.

“The relevance of multilateralism has proven to be essential for our coordinated actions. Suriname recognizes the eminent role that the United Nations fulfils in ensuring lasting development and peace, and we pledge our unwavering commitment to the work of the United Nations,” she concluded.
At UN, Indian Minister urges leaders to turn ‘shadow of turmoil’ into a golden age for civilization

26 September – Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly, India’s External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, underscored her country’s commitment to the comprehensive implementation of the 2030 Agenda and said that the national parliament has dedicated one day in each session to discuss and monitor its progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“We are all aware that one-sixth of humanity lives in India. Therefore, global success in realizing SDGs depends on the success achieved in India,” said Minister Swaraj in her address today.

Reporting that the SDGs are matched by India’s development vision, she outlined national programmes on sanitation, education, poverty alleviation and financial inclusion, promoting innovation in technology, and building skills of the youth and said: “These initiatives have added a new dimension to India's growth story, making it the fastest growing major economy in the world at a time of slow global growth.”

Ms. Swaraj also underlined the seriousness of the threats posed by climate change and called on everyone to curb reckless consumption and to adopt lifestyles that are in harmony with nature. In this context, she particularly emphasized the role of Yoga, which she said embodies a sustainable lifestyle. She also highlighted that the country has launched an initiative to meet 40 per cent of its energy needs through non-fossil fuel sources by 2030.

Turning to the global threat of terrorism and underlining that the scourge targets the innocent and kills indiscriminately, she called on the global body to look into who actually benefits from acts of terrorism.

“In our midst, there are nations that still speak the language of terrorism, that nurture it, peddle it, and export it,” she said, adding: “These nations, in which UN declared terrorists roam freely, lead processions and deliver their poisonous sermons of hate with impunity, are as culpable as the very terrorists they harbour.”

“Such countries should have no place in the comity of nations,” she stressed.

Speaking specifically on Pakistan, she underlined that that India has not set any pre-conditions for dialogue but in fact has reached out to the country numerous times, and added that despite its efforts, India has had to contend with cross-border terrorism.

“My firm advice to Pakistan is: abandon this dream,” said Ms. Swaraj referring to, what she called: “The belief that such attacks will enable it to obtain the territory it covets.”

The Indian Minister also called the General Assembly to act with a fresh resolve and urgency to adopt the comprehensive convention on international terrorism, which her country has proposed in 1996.

Further, she said reforms at the UN Security Council, including expanding the number of permanent and non-permanent members in the body to reflect contemporary realities, is an urgent necessity.

In conclusion, she called for united and concerted efforts to turn the 21st century into a golden age for humanity and
At UN, Gulf State Ministers stress importance of ‘good neighbourliness’ in Middle East

26 September – Addressing the United Nations General Assembly, the Foreign Ministers of Bahrain and Oman today expressed concerns about instability in the Middle East region, citing the links between peace and development, and emphasizing the importance of being good neighbours to each other.

“Development goes hand in hand with the security and stability of the citizens and society at large,” Bahrain’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, told the Assembly’s annual debate. “Neither can be achieved in separation from the other, and neither can be attained without a stable and secure state, with good governance and solid and effective institutions,” he added.

He said his country attaches great importance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the leadership of King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, and has already started achieving the targets as documented by among others, the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) report for this year, which ranked Bahrain in first place worldwide for the highest growth rate of women’s participation in economic activities.

Bahrain has also launched ‘Economic Vision 2030,’ clearly affirming that the wellbeing, happiness and stability of its citizens are the main pillars of development in all fields and that the Government’s efforts to achieve the international development goals go in parallel with its national economic vision, the Government Action Plan, and Bahrain’s Country Programme Document between Bahrain and the UN Development Programme.

However, he underscored the enormity of the challenges facing the wider Middle East, which are considered grave threats to international peace and security. “It is for this reason that the protection of the foundations of the nation-State in our countries and preventing their collapse in other countries is the basis for sustaining security, development and prosperity. It deserves to become the major objective of all actors and groupings of the international community without double standards or hidden agendas,” he explained.

Anti-terrorist measures will not be effective through legislation and laws that contravene the UN Charter and the principles of international law, such as the step taken by the American Congress in passing the ‘Justice Against the Sponsors of Terrorism Act,’ which jeopardizes international relations based on the principle of equal sovereignty of states and their sovereign immunity, he noted.

“It constitutes a dangerous precedent in relations between nations, and a threat to the stability of the international system, which in turn adversely affects international efforts to combat terrorism,” he warned.

On Syria, he called on all states with some leverage on the crisis there, notably the United States and Russia, to join efforts towards the achievement of a political solution to the crisis along the lines of the Geneva Communiqué and UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

As for the situation in Yemen, Bahrain, as a member of the Arab Coalition to Restore the Legitimacy in Yemen, will continue its steadfast efforts.

Concerning Iran, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman – and all Arab countries, have spared no effort to build with this neighbouring country the best possible relations on the basis of good neighbourliness and respect for State sovereignty.
“However, all these efforts and sincere wishes were met with no serious response from Iran, and always ended either in an impasse or by the fabrication of new problems and crises to return us to square one,” he said, expressing concern over “Iran’s attempts to jeopardize our security and social peace through support provided to groups and militias under its authority such as the terrorist Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.”

He stressed that the Middle East has made tremendous human contributions and great civilizational achievements, and these were only made possible “because all who lived in this region did so in full security and harmony, away from the dividing lines of ethnicities, ideologies and religions.”

Also addressing the Assembly this morning, Oman’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah, said “every problem has its own solution, if interests converge and if the political will exists, and if concerted efforts are exerted.”

Oman has been among the countries that adopted the policy of dialogue, negotiation and conciliation to settle disputes by peaceful means, based on the provisions of UN Charter VI, and norms and recollections of human heritage.

“Our country has managed to establish friendly relations and cooperation with all countries of the world,” he said.

He stressed the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian issue for the stability in the Middle East, renewing his country’s call to the international community to intensify efforts through a new perspective that would enable the concerned parties to reach a comprehensive and just settlement that would end this long conflict.

Believing in the importance of adhering to the principle of dialogue to resolving disputes by peaceful means, Oman has sought to reconcile points of views that cause conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Libya. Oman, in coordination with the UN, has hosted several meetings in that vein.

He went on to state that since the onset of those crises, Oman has worked with the parties concerned to reconcile their points of view, while encouraging them to reject differences and resume negotiations. Highlighting, in particular, the efforts of Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, to bring the Yemeni parties together, he emphasized the need for joint international supporting action.

**Routinely ‘written off,’ Eritrea is rebounding and keen to achieve Global Goals, Minister tells UN**

26 September – Telling the United Nations General Assembly that over the 25 years of Eritrea’s independence it has faced a “concerted onslaught” of difficulties – incessant hostility, occupation, and sanctions – the country’s Foreign Minister today said that resilient Eritrea and Eritreans, at home and abroad, were nevertheless able to fend off the attacks on their nation and protect their hard-won freedom.

“Few gave Eritrea a fighting chance. We were routinely written off, our imminent collapse predicted with regularity,” Osman Saleh, Minister of Foreign Affairs said at the Assembly’s annual debate, adding that the country and its people, through “sheer determination,” resisted the onslaught, and, after a difficult decade-and-a-half, the country is moving up; its economy is rebounding, infrastructure is being built and, among others, favourable conditions are being created to provide quality education.

“The pressures, coercion and hostility that Eritrea has faced are by no means exceptional or distinctive,” he said, arguing that in the Horn of Africa region, they are only one element of a misguided policy pursued over a quarter of a century that has fuelled violence, conflict, instability, and fragmentation, as well as extremism and terrorism. Indeed, many nation that
cherish dignity and independent decision-making “have to face the wrath of those who wish to cling to their domination and privilege.”

He went on to stress that more broadly, unsustainable policies of greed and pillage and the reckless resort to unilateral pressure and force to secure unilateral advantage, instead of seeking common ground and mutual interests, is pushing the world on an extremely dangerous path. To that end, he said the pending decision by the United States to adopt legislation that nullifies national sovereign immunity constitutes a violation of international law and a dangerous precedent with grave implications.

“In our region […] the past two decades have generally been a period of missed opportunities, of zero-sum games, of repeated conflicts and setbacks. Even today, the situation remains fraught with risk and danger,” noted Mr. Saleh, yet recent developments indicate the possibility of an opening for a new beginning, for re-launching the vision of a peaceful, progressive, economically dynamic and cooperative Horn of Africa.

To this end, he said that Eritrea is keen to build on its encouraging achievements to transform its economy and society, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), mainly by relying on the energy, skills and initiative of its people and the judicious use of its natural resources. “It is also determined to work actively and constructively, and in collaboration with its neighbours, for peace, stability and prosperity in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea regions,” he concluded.

**Achieving 2030 Agenda will require overcoming rising ‘feeling of chaos,’ Belarus tells UN Assembly**

26 September – There is a feeling among people today that the world is not “developing within the framework of rational order and common sense” as conflicts and an increasing number of transnational conflicts give rise to a feeling of chaos, the Deputy Vice Minister of Belarus told delegations in the United Nations today adding that such chaos exists side by side with unprecedented interconnectedness and technological progress.

“In other words, we are living in a time of contradictory realities,” Valentin Rybakov said, arguing that today’s turbulence has become a “serious competitor” with positive globalization processes due to several factors, including because the so-called winners of the Cold War did not want to integrate the “losers” into the system, instead attempting to impose their will upon them, with “terrible consequences.” And as a result, the world is in political transition without knowing where it is moving towards.

In economic terms, healthy competition between the market and the State was important, but in recent decades that balance has been disturbed as the market gained the upper hand, and the State has been relegated to “second place,” he said. As a result, a minority of people accumulated more wealth while others suffered; environmental challenges have been exacerbated because the market was concerned only with profit.

Moving on to the less obvious but equally troubling impacts of the social sphere, Mr. Rybakov said there is a growing social and cultural gap, marked by the emergence of a counter-culture in the West, he said, questioning why such changes should affect the rest of the world, including those not subject to the same historical reasons for the shift.

Understanding the reasons for the unstable and contradictory world order was a start, but in order to change it, a clear understanding of the desired new world order is needed, he continued. While this is of course, easier said than done [and] everyone will have to give up something” the new system should be State-driven because anarchy reigned where the State was weak. It should be inclusive, so that everyone would have a real voice within it, “not just for the sake of appearances.”

The new system could not be imposed, but cultivated, so that it would be viewed as fair by politicians and ordinary people.
alike. Also, regional blocs increasingly played an independent role that until recently had been the prerogative of States. Cooperation must therefore be established between regions as between States, he said, noting that Belarus is an active participant in a range of regional processes.

Calling for dialogue rather than imposing views on one another, he said by example that Belarus is committed to the values of traditional families, while other countries recognize a variety of forms, Mr. Rybakov continued. “We don’t need to demonstrate the [correctness] of our approaches,” he said, explaining that such different approaches could and should lead to a positive result. Belarus saw an opportunity in the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs – due to meet in March 2017 – in terms of the draft resolution on the role of the family in preventing the illicit drug trade, he said. “Let’s think together about how the family may help in this area, despite the fact that we understand this concept differently,” he said.

As Gabon high court upholds results in presidential poll, Ban says UN will support democratic process

25 September – United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has taken note of the ruling of the Constitutional Court of Gabon on the appeals lodged against the preliminary results of the 27 August 2016 presidential poll, as well as its confirmation of Ali Bongo Ondimba as President-elect, according to a statement issued by a UN spokesperson today, which adds that the Organization will continue to support the democratic process in the West African country.

“The Secretary-General welcomes the call by the President-elect for national dialogue. Such a dialogue must be representative of all stakeholders towards national reconciliation, inclusive governance, and the adoption of consensual measures for peaceful and credible legislative elections in December 2016, the statement said.

Mr. Ban in the statement goes on to say that at this critical and sensitive juncture in the country’s history, it is of utmost importance that all actors demonstrate maximum restraint and fully respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

“The Secretary-General calls for the release of any persons detained arbitrarily during the electoral process,” said the statement, noting that the UN remains committed to supporting the democratic process and sustainable development in Gabon, and will continue to work closely with national, regional and international partners in that regard.

Following the late August election, clashes broke out out between protesters and security forces after the 31 August release of official provisional results, which declared President Bongo the winner, reportedly by a margin of less than 6,000 votes. According to media reports, hundreds of people were arrested.
UN chief commends Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders on 'remarkable progress'

25 September – Following a “productive” meeting today with Mustafa Akıncý, Turkish Cypriot leader, and Nicos Anastasiades, Greek Cypriot leader, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed their joint commitment to intensify efforts even further, in line with their stated desire to achieve a comprehensive settlement in 2016.

“We discussed the state of play in the ongoing negotiations to reach a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus,” Mr. Ban told reporters after his meeting with the two leaders at UN Headquarters in New York, where the General Assembly's high-level segment is under way.

The Secretary-General said he commended both leaders for their remarkable efforts to date, and for the progress achieved. Welcoming their joint commitment to press ahead with their stated desire to achieve a comprehensive settlement in 2016, the UN chief said that he encouraged them to continue to engage in the process with determination, courage and creativity.

“They informed me that they intend to further intensify their negotiations upon their return to Cyprus. I urged them to make the most of this opportunity, in order to resolve their outstanding issues, without delay, in earnest,” said Mr. Ban, adding: “[They] asked me to step up my personal engagement in the process. I stand ready to support them in whatever they may require, including on the international dimensions of the issue.”

Stating that the period ahead will be crucial for Cyprus, the Secretary-General said: “Time is of the essence. The United Nations and I will do our utmost to promote a successful outcome.”

The UN works through the good offices of the Secretary-General to assist the sides in the search for a comprehensive and mutually acceptable settlement to the Cyprus problem. The UN Department of Political Affairs provides backstopping support and guidance to the Secretary-General's Special Adviser, Espen Barth Eide, who was appointed August 2014.

Mr. Ban took the opportunity of the press conference to comment on the situation in Syria, saying that he is appalled by the military escalation in the city of Aleppo, “which is facing the most sustained and intense bombardment since the start of the Syrian conflict.”

“The use of bunker busting bombs brings the violence to new depths of barbarity. Let us remember: the fighting has forced hospitals and schools to operate in basements. These bombs are not busting bunkers; they are demolishing ordinary people looking for any last refuge of safety,” he stressed.

The Secretary-General noted that international law is clear: the systematic use of indiscriminate weapons in densely populated areas is a war crime.

He noted that the UN Security Council met in an emergency session this morning to discussing the situation. “What excuse is there for anything less than determined action to stop the mayhem? How much longer will all those with influence allow such cruelty to continue?” he said, urging all involved to work harder “for an end to the nightmare.”
At Security Council, UN envoy appeals for Russia and US cooperation to pull Syria 'away from the brink'

25 September – Amid the unprecedented military assault on eastern Aleppo, where fireballs from incendiary bombs “light up the pitch darkness,” the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria today strongly appealed to the Security Council – particularly permanent members Russia and the United States – to rescue a recently collapsed cessation of hostilities, end the bloodshed and speed aid into the iconic city where, overall, some two million people remain under a de facto siege.

“These are indeed chilling days for Syria and particularly, for the people of Aleppo, as last week was one of the worst in this six year of the conflict,” Staffan de Mistura told an emergency session of the Council called by France, the United Kingdom and the United States, echoing a statement issued by a UN spokesperson yesterday which said the Secretary-General is “appalled” by the escalating violence since the announcement two days ago by the Syrian Army of an offensive to capture eastern Aleppo.

Reporting that Aleppo is being reduced to rubble in the face of a “remarkable new intensity – unprecedented in scale and type of bombing,” Mr. de Mistura said “this Council has the responsibility to relaunch the cessation of hostilities” and reiterated his appeal for a common course of action, led by Russia and the UN, in three areas: ensuring a ceasefire; establishing weekly 48 hour pauses in the fighting to allow in aid and repairs for Aleppo's damaged water and power facilities; and allow medical evacuations for urgent cases in and around the city.

The respective taskforces on humanitarian aid delivery and a wider ceasefire, created by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), have been meeting separately since early this year on a way forward in the crisis. Russia and the United States are the co-chairs of the taskforces and ISSG, which comprises the UN, the Arab League, the European Union and 16 other countries.

‘Fireballs of such intensity they light up the pitch darkness in eastern Aleppo’

“The one constant in this violently unpredictable conflict is that neither side will win, and that the Syrian people will lose, and they are losing their lives, day by day,” he told the Council as the announcement of a cessation of hostilities in early September, the already dire humanitarian situation in Aleppo has deteriorated even further since the Government decided to unilaterally end the truce and begin airstrikes.

Mr. de Mistura painted a grave picture of the situation on the ground, saying that information received by Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) indicates dozens of airstrikes on Friday and Saturday have hit residential buildings across the de facto besieged eastern Aleppo, causing scores of reported civilian deaths and injuries, including those of many children.

“First responders appear overwhelmed and unable to respond at many of the sites. We have seen reports of three of the four centres operated by the 'White Helmets' in eastern Aleppo being hit,” he said, adding that as the casualties mount, rescue workers are struggling to pull people from under the rubble.

He said airstrikes are reported to have killed 213 people in Aleppo province, 139 of them in eastern Aleppo. “We have heard the word 'unprecedented' – in quantity and also in scale and type – [to describe the] bombing. We have seen reports, videos and pictures of reported use of incendiary bombs that create fireballs of such intensity that they light up the pitch darkness in eastern Aleppo as if it is actually daylight,” said the Special Envoy.
A tiny window of opportunity still exists for Russia and the US to actually help the Syrians and the region step away from the brink

“We now hear of bunker-busting bombs being used and see pictures of large craters in the earth much larger than in previous aerial bombings,” he said, adding that the systematic indiscriminate use of such weapons in areas where civilians and civilian infrastructure are present is confirmed, it may amount to war crimes. He pointed out: “Sources on the ground tell us that they no longer have the capacity to count them accurately, given the chaos in Aleppo city, due to the fact they often take place at night and with remarkable new intensity.”

Despite the Syrian Government's reportedly stated desire to liberate “every inch” of Syria and “squeeze out terrorists without civilian casualties,” major military clashes are occurring on the front lines and there are contradicting statements from the opposition on whether the counter offenses were led by Al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant or the Fatah Halab operations room of the Free Syrian Army, he said.

The so-called military victory or solution in Syria is impossible, including in Aleppo, he said, warning that: “If the Syrian Government is intent on retaking it completely, it is going to be a slow, grinding, street-by-street fight over the course of months if not years, whereby the ancient city will be completely destroyed.”

“Neither side will win and therefore both will ultimately lose, and the Syrian people will lose,” he said, if the violence did not stop. There is an “illusion of imminent victory”, he continued, saying: “The so-called military victory or solution in Syria is impossible, including in Aleppo.”

Security Council must make 'eleventh hour' attempt to rescue cessation of hostilities

In forging the 9 September agreement, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and United States Secretary of State John Kerry said they were concerned about making statements without follow up. “I want to believe that they really meant what they said and they really want it to work,” he said. But, the world and the Syrians are losing any remaining hope and the international community is losing credibility with its partners.

“A tiny window of opportunity still exists,” he said, for the Russian Federation and the US to actually help the Syrians and the region step away from the brink of more years of bloody conflict, which risks “becoming even worse.”

Recalling that China's Foreign Minister had said on Thursday that the Council had the responsibility to ensure the cessation of hostilities was re-launched, he said: “The conflict cannot be resolved through negotiations without the help of the co-chairs. I am asking and urging them to go that extra mile to save the 9 September agreement at the eleventh hour,” stressing the need to end terrorism in Syria and the region and to ground the Syrian air force.

He called for the Council to work out a common course of action towards a cessation of hostilities. “I'm still convinced that we can see a turn of events,” he said, underscoring that the international community has come too far to quit. He said he had been asked why he did not just resign, but he would not as doing so would be a signal that the UN abandoning the Syrians, and we will not abandon the Syrians, and neither will you,” he told the Council.