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Central African Republic: Half the population needs humanitarian support, says UN

28 November – With nearly half the population in the Central African Republic (CAR) in need of humanitarian assistance, some $400 million is required over the coming year to shore up relief efforts that will be critical “to save the lives of people who are among the poorest and most forgotten on this planet,” a senior United Nations official said today.

Speaking to UN Member States in Geneva, the Minister for Social Welfare and Reconciliation, Virginie Baikoua, and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for CAR, Fabrizio Hochschild, said the funds are desperately needed despite the progress made over the past three years.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest. More than 13,000 UN staff are currently based in the country as part of the UN Integrated Multifaceted Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).

Sounding the alarm about the dire situation in the country, Mr. Hochschild said the CAR’s “chronic poverty and obscurity has been compounded by conflict. In the last three months six conflicts erupted leading to hundreds of deaths and tens of thousands displaced, and I don’t know if it commanded a single line in the international press.”
Nearly $400 million is required to meet the needs of 1.6 million Central Africans in 2017, according to the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2017, which complements the 5-year national recovery and stabilization plan that was launched by the CAR Government in Brussels on 17 November.

Despite its considerable agricultural potential, CAR has some of the highest chronic malnutrition rates in the world – almost one in two children – due to ongoing insecurity, poor access to clean water and health care, as well as lack of seeds and tools. Maternal and early childhood mortality rates are also among the highest in the world.

Eruptions of violence over the past year meant that one in 10 war weary central African remains a refugee, the majority in neighbouring Cameroon, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

However, of the close to one million people who were displaced within the country in early 2014, almost half have returned home. In this regard, Mr. Hochschild underscored that “humanitarian efforts are critical to stabilise the country while its pressing development, political and security needs are addressed.”

Moreover, outside the capital, Bangui, Mr. Hochschild described “an economy of war” that is preventing peaceful development and which is responsible for ongoing poverty and malnutrition.

Although the UN representative said there are “no quick fixes” for CAR, he hopes that this time, it could become a “beacon of peace” in a troubled region, partly because the country now has its first democratically elected Government, which is actively engaging with international partners.

‘Hang on to every little glimmer of hope,’ says UN envoy for South Sudan

28 November – All people in South Sudan, regardless of their ethnic affiliation, must unite towards creating a national identity, the head of the United Nations mission there urged today, underscoring the potential of the resource-rich African country to prosper despite its ongoing challenges.

Creating a prosperous future “is possible because South Sudan is such a rich country in terms of resources and fertile land,” Ellen Margrethe Løj told reporters at what is expected to be the final press briefing in her capacity as the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and the head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

Ms. Løj will step down at the end of November after more than two years of leading UNMISS, which was set up in 2011 after South Sudan gained independence from Sudan. It played a major role in trying to protect civilians when war broke out in 2013 between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and those of then Vice-President Riek Machar.

“We have not yet finished our job, we don’t have peace in South Sudan, we don’t have prosperity in South Sudan,” she said at the press briefing held at the Mission’s compound in Juba, the nation’s capital.

“But I think we all have to work for that. I am extremely moved by having learned so much about South Sudan, I am extremely impressed by the resilience of the South Sudanese people,” she said.

On the other hand, “I am extremely depressed that their hopes and aspirations at the time of independence have not yet been fulfilled, the conflict that erupted in December 2013 continues to make many South Sudanese homeless, internally displaced or refugees in neighbouring countries,” she noted.
She urged all South Sudanese and especially the country’s leaders to put the well-being of their people, including the boys and girls, in the forefront of their actions.

When peace arrives, the South Sudanese could feed themselves, take care of their families, fulfil their dreams, and see the country that they fought so hard for grow and prosper, she said.

She believes that like South Africa, Ghana and other many countries that comprise various ethnic groups, South Sudan can achieve national unity.

Asked if South Sudan is on the verge of collapse or becoming ‘failed State,’ Ms. Løj said she does not want to “put labels” on the country but acknowledged that there is fighting in various areas, and the economy is in a very bad shape. “Something has to be done in order to turn that around and to start moving forward, and first and foremost the guns have to be silent,” she said.

“I have not given up on South Sudan,” she stressed, explaining that she used to say to her colleagues: “Yes, when we look at the news in the morning it might be depressing, if you go on a patrol or visit and monitor human rights it might be depressing, but hang on to every little glimmer of hope and argue for that hope to expand because we are here to improve the lives of the people of South Sudan.”

Ellen Margrethe Løj, the outgoing Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), urged the country’s leaders to put the well-being of their people at the forefront of their actions. Meanwhile, she called on the South Sudanese to build national identity regardless of ethnic affiliation.

UN agencies scaling up emergency health services as Mosul is made accessible

28 November – United Nations agencies are rapidly scaling up efforts in eastern Mosul to ensure that more than 60,000 people living near the frontlines of the current military operations have access to life-saving care.

Two World Health Organization (WHO) clinics were recently deployed in the city to provide residents with health services aid for the first time since June 2014. A UN Population Fund (UNFPA) mobile unit is providing delivery services to women and girls.

In addition to immediate care, the agencies are restoring services at the primary health care clinic in eastern Mosul through disbursement of medicines and other supplies. The clinic, managed by the Ninewah Department of Health, offers primary health care services, vaccinations, and reproductive health services.

“Civilians in conflict areas have suffered enough. They should not be further exposed to avoidable health risks. Together with national health authorities and health partners, WHO aims to reach all people in newly accessible areas. WHO is providing mobile medical clinics, ambulances, medicines and supplies that ensure life-saving health care for thousands of people affected by Mosul operations,” said Altaf Musani, WHO Representative in Iraq.

WHO and UNFPA expect an increase in patients from Mosul and are accordingly scaling up health services to include three primary health care units and two delivery units. They have also positioned mobile medical units and delivery units at a nearby trauma stabilization point in anticipation of trauma injuries and complex deliveries.

“As new areas become accessible, UNFPA will continue to provide frontline emergency response to meet the reproductive health needs of women and girls including lifesaving medical services to pregnant women. UNFPA is currently supporting and operating 30 mobile/static reproductive health services in total as part of Mosul response operations,” said Ramanathan
Balakrishnan, UNFPA Representative in Iraq.

Experts expect new areas in Mosul to become accessible in the coming weeks, which means that more than 200,000 people will need emergency health services. This includes nearly 40,000 people who will require urgent interventions followed by hospital care as well as 8,000 pregnant women needed services for deliveries and newborn care.

The mobile clinics are funded with support from the United States Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the European Union Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO), and the Iraqi humanitarian pooled fund. Additional mobile medical clinics will soon be deployed.

‘Massive efforts’ under way in flood-hit northern DPRK require additional support – UN

28 November – While nearly 12,000 families in northern Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK) have moved into new houses three months after devastating Typhoon Lionrock destroyed their homes, the United Nations is reporting that this “massive effort” still needs additional support so damaged water networks can be repaired and essential medicines and nutritious foods can be provided.

Local authorities in North Hamgyong province say that repairs were made to 17,698 households, including 11,928 new homes built for families. Local agencies have also been providing flood-affected people with food, medicine, shelter, water and sanitation assistance, warm clothes and household items to meet the immediate needs. In addition, the Government issued a special request for the agencies to contribute towards roofing for the new homes and public institutions.

Following a joint mission between the DPRK Government and humanitarian agencies working in some of the country’s worst flood-hit areas, Tapan Mishra, the UN Resident Coordinator in DPR Korea, said it was inspiring to see first-hand all the work that has been gone into rehousing of the displaced people, rebuilding hospitals, clinics, schools and repairing damaged infrastructure.

“While there is no doubt that massive efforts have been made to bring relief to the people in the affected areas, especially to provide housing as a priority before severe winter sets in, additional support is still needed. More than 27,000 hectares of agricultural land was inundated by the flood waters, while kitchen gardens were destroyed and livestock killed. All of these will take time to replenish. In addition, water networks in the affected counties remain partially broken, while essential medicines and nutritious food continue to be a pressing need to prevent malnutrition and outbreaks of disease.”

Mr. Mishra also stated that this mission provides a great opportunity to evaluate flood-affected areas and discuss possible solutions with the national authorities, including how they can work together to meet the basic needs of the people as the winter is around the corner. He also added that despite generous support from the donors, more assistance is still urgently required to make sure than no one is left behind.

At the end of August, Typhoon Lionrock struck northern DPRK, damaging many lives and property, and bringing the cost of the response to be $29 million according to Flood Emergency Response Plan. To date, humanitarian agencies in DPRK have raised only $12 million.
With 500,000 children living under siege in Syria, UNICEF calls for humanitarian access

28 November – As the number of children living under siege has doubled in less than one year to nearly 500,000 amid escalating violence across Syria, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has called for lifting sieges and allowing immediate humanitarian access.

“For millions of human beings in Syria, life has become an endless nightmare – in particular for the hundreds of thousands of children living under siege,” said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake, according to a news release which also stated that children are now playing and studying in underground spaces.

“Children are being killed and injured, too afraid to go to school or even play, surviving with little food and hardly any medicine. This is no way to live – and too many are dying,” he added.

UNICEF said that the 500,000 children live in 16 besieged areas across the country, almost completely cut off from sustained humanitarian aid and basic services. Some communities have received little to no aid in nearly two years. In eastern Aleppo alone, the agency estimates that 100,000 children are living under siege.

In the absence of safe spaces, children are turning to basement playgrounds, schools and hospitals to continue playing, learning and, when necessary, seeking medical care. In one besieged area, a group of volunteers built a playground and a park by linking a series of basements.

On average, around 200 children come to this playground every day. In another besieged area, an underground school provides 250 girls with the chance to keep learning.

As the conflict nears six years, UNICEF has renewed its call on all parties to lift the sieges across Syria, and to allow and facilitate immediate, unconditional and sustained humanitarian access to all areas across the country.
Refugees in Chad facing continued food insecurity, joint UN agency assessment reveals

28 November – A joint assessment by the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP), has revealed that 43 per cent of refugees who have been living in Chad for more than 10 years continue to face a precarious food security situation and require assistance.

Chad is home to some 400,000 refugees, 310,000 of which are from Darfur (Sudan) and another 70,000 from the Central African Republic (CAR). Those from Sudan have been arriving since 2002 while those from CAR have been displaced for more than 10 years. The country has also received 5,000 refugees from Nigeria as a result of the violence perpetuated by Boko Haram.

These people are in addition to 100,000 internally displaced persons who live at makeshift sites and 5,000 urban refugees who live in N’Djamena, the country’s capital, without assistance.

In addition to the high number of refugees who are food insecure, more than 40 per cent are suffering from chronic malnutrition and the majority of children under the age of five are affected by anaemia.

“Lack of resources has forced us to reduce food rations for refugees to less than half,” announced WFP Chad Country Director Mary-Ellen McGroarty, in a joint news release.

Biometric registration and careful targeting according to vulnerability and needs have somewhat lessened the impact of the cuts, and the WFP continues to explore opportunities with UNHCR that would link food and non-food assistance to longer-term resilience projects that would benefit both refugees and local communities.

In order to diversify refugees’ meals and stimulate local markets, WFP is also looking into cash assistance. However, the short term requires basic food needs to be met in order to prevent further deterioration to their nutritional situation.

The joint assessment also reports a need to invest in training, small trade, and microfinance schemes or farming projects. It recommends that voluntary returns ought to be considered once the situation in peoples’ countries of origin allow.

“We must retain the protection character of our refugee operation and the social contract between UNHCR and the Government,” said UNHCR Representative in Chad Jose Antonio Canhandula.

“We should also move on from offering assistance to investing in human capacities, and integrate the refugee programme into a broader development programme. Our international protection mandate cannot be fully achieved without ensuring food security for refugees and for their host communities,” he added.

The joint assessment is available online in French.
UN committee on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage opens session in Ethiopia

Performers at the opening in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, of the 11th session of the United Nations Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Photo: UNESCO

28 November – More than 300 artists and performers showcased the wealth of Ethiopia’s intangible cultural heritage in Addis Ababa on Sunday ahead of today’s opening of the 11th session of the United Nations Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), intangible cultural heritage refers to “traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants,” including oral traditions, rituals and skills to produce traditional crafts.

During the opening ceremony, UNESCO Deputy Director-General Getachew Engida spotlighted the “tremendous advances,” achieved since the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage entered into force, as a picture of “peace, diversity and inclusion.”

“To support member States, UNESCO places the emphasis on strengthening human and institutional capacities at the country level through the capacity-building strategy adopted by the Committee, which has been implemented in more than 70 countries,” he explained. “A greater focus will be placed on policy support, to ensure that sufficient attention is paid to intangible cultural heritage in national development plans,” Mr. Engida added.

Mulatu Teshome, President of Ethiopia, pointed to Ethiopia as the Africa’s oldest independent country, saying “more than 80 nations with distinct cultural traditions and values live here and speak more than 80 different languages.”

Ethiopia has been a member of and has collaborated with UNESCO since 1955.

The Chairperson of UNESCO’s Executive Board, Michael Worbs, pointed out that the Committee was meeting in Africa for the fourth time since its creation in 2006, demonstrating “the central importance that intangible cultural heritage has for Africa as a whole,” and the priority of Africa in UNESCO’s actions.

The Committee brings together representatives of 24 States Parties to the Convention, who, through 2 December, at the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in Addis Ababa, will examine five nominations for inscription on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and 37 requests for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Ten years after the Convention entered into force, the Committee will examine creation of a monitoring instrument to measure its impact and progress achieved.

The List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, which currently features 43 particularly vulnerable elements of the living heritage, helps States Parties to the Convention to rally international cooperation and assistance to maintain cultural practices with the agreement of the communities concerned. Among other elements, they will examine the Cossack’s songs of Dnipropetrovsk Region in Ukraine; Chapei Dang Veng in Cambodia; and Ma’di bowl lyre music and dance in Uganda.

To date, UNESCO’s 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has been ratified by 171 States Parties. Its Intergovernmental Committee meets annually to implement the Convention and examine requests for inscription on its various lists.
Participants endorse 'Ashgabat Statement' as first-ever UN conference on sustainable transport ends

27 November – The first-ever United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference concluded today in the Turkmen capital, with more than 50 countries endorsing the 'Ashgabat Statement on Commitments and Policy Recommendations,' with a view to supporting cleaner, greener transportation – from local transit systems to worldwide multimodal networks.

“The Conference has reinforced the importance of sustainable transport and has shown it is a shared global task,” said Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, at the closing ceremony.

“Sustainable transport solutions are key to leaving no one behind, securing prosperity, enabling access to services and protecting the environment,” concluded Mr. Wu, noting that “without sustainable transport, there will be no lasting progress on climate action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”

Noting the many encouraging success stories delegates had shared at the two-day conference, Mr. Wu said more needed to be done, including mobilizing trillions of dollars in investments and implementing legal, regulatory and governance frameworks. He also underlined the need to continue and strengthen capacity-building to developing countries.

We must use our shared understanding to advance sustainable transport for all, by delivering on our commitments, forging new alliances and transforming our policies

Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

“We have identified areas for regional and international cooperation and shared far-reaching policy recommendations,” he said. “We have, collectively and individually, identified concrete actions to move the world towards the new and essential paradigm of sustainable transport. Looking ahead, we must use our shared understanding to advance sustainable transport for all, by delivering on our commitments, forging new alliances and transforming our policies.”

He added that policy decisions needed to meet the needs of all in a low-carbon manner, requiring integrating transport modes and tapping into technological opportunities to bring the fundamental, transformative changes.

Stakeholders endorse 'Ashgabat Statement'

Concluding the two-day conference with the so-called 'Ashgabat Statement,' participants stressed the need to promote the integration of science, technology and innovation into sustainable transport systems by tapping into technological opportunities in the decades to come, in order to bring about fundamental, transformative changes to transport systems.

This, they said, can be achieved through the use of energy-efficient technology, as well as information and communications technology, as they called for strengthening capacity-building support to developing countries.

They also welcomed stakeholders who had developed and launched sustainable transport initiatives, and called on all stakeholders to continue to seek collaborative partnerships for new, innovative, sustainable transport paradigms.

Also during the closing ceremony, Igor Runov, UN Under-Secretary-General and Head of the International Road Transport Union, presented the summary of the Transport Business Forum, which had been held earlier in the day.
Three other events held today focused on transport safety, the needs of countries in special situations – mostly least developed countries – and avenues for financing sustainable transport.

“Sustainable transport is a challenge for all countries, but countries in special situations, including least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing states, face particular obstacles,” said Gyan Chandra Acharya, UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative dealing with the needs of those countries (UN-OHRLLS), in his opening remarks to an event focused on sustainable transport and transit solutions in countries in special situations.

**Developing countries face challenges in financing sustainable transport systems**

Among the challenges highlighted by the panelists, and which, they acknowledged, must be addressed in order to achieve sustainable development in these countries, include high transport cost, restricted access to the sea, limited air service for passengers and cargo, and difficulties securing investments and partnerships.

“There are, altogether, about 1.1 billion people in these countries, so when we look at the global programmes, global solutions, as well as global development frameworks, we have to look at those countries if we want to leave no one behind, and make it inclusive of all,” noted Mr. Acharya, referring to the rallying call of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Conference, which opened yesterday, brought together key stakeholders from Governments, the UN system and other international organizations, the private sector, and civil society to engage in a dialogue that emphasizes the integrated and cross-cutting nature of sustainable transport and its multiple roles in supporting the achievement of the SDGs. All modes of transport – road, rail, aviation, ferry and maritime – were addressed.

**As Cuba mourns passing of former President Fidel Castro, Ban offers condolences, UN support**

26 November – Speaking on behalf of the United Nations, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon this morning extended condolences to the Cuban people and to the family of former President Fidel Castro Ruz, who passed away overnight at the age of 90.

“At this time of national mourning, I offer the support of the United Nations to work alongside the people of the island,” Mr. Ban told reporters in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, where he is attending the Global Sustainable Transport Conference. He offered his particular condolences to Cuban President Raúl Castro Ruz.

Fidel Castro served as Cuba's President from 1976 to 2008.

Recalling vividly his meeting with former President Fidel Castro during a visit to Cuba in January 2014, Mr. Ban said the two had held a lively discussion that covered developments around the world, sustainable development and climate change.

“Under former President Castro, Cuba made advances in the fields of education literacy and health. I hope that Cuba will continue to advance on a path of reform and greater prosperity,” the Secretary-General concluded.

A statement issued later in the day by Mr. Ban's spokesperson in New York noted that former President Castro was an emblematic figure of the Cuban revolution, prominent in Latin America and influential in world affairs.

“As Prime Minister, President, Commander of the Cuban Armed Forces and First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party,
his role at the helm of Cuba spanned nearly 50 years, during which he left a major imprint on his country and on global politics,” the statement said, adding: “His revolutionary ideals left few indifferent. He was a strong voice for social justice in global discussions at the UN General Assembly and international and regional forums.”

In a separate statement, the President of the General Assembly, Peter Thomson also expressed his sincere condolences to former President Castro’s family, including his brother President Raul Castro, as well as the Government and People of Cuba.

“Fidel Castro was one of the iconic leaders of the 20th century,” said Mr. Thomson. “With a great love for his homeland and the Cuban people, he dedicated his life to their welfare and development.”

“A tireless advocate for equity in the international arena, Fidel Castro was an inspirational figure for developing countries in particular,” he added, saying that “his dedication to their advancement, especially in the fields of education and health, would be long remembered.”

'The answer to global transportation challenges is not less transport – it is sustainable transport' – UN chief

26 November – Opening the first-ever Global Sustainable Transport Conference, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told delegations gathered in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, that the world has the resolve, commitment, imagination and creativity “to transform our transport systems in a sustainable manner that will improve human wellbeing, enhance social progress and protect our planet.”

“This sector is responsible for nearly a quarter of energy-related greenhouse gas emissions. And that is expected to substantially increase in the future,” said Mr. Ban in his opening remarks to the conference, which opened today in the Turkmen capital and wraps up tomorrow, adding: “Without action on the transportation front, we will not be able to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius and as close to 1.5 as possible.”

The 2 degrees Celsius threshold was set by global leaders with the adoption of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change last December, which entered into force early this month, on 4 November 2016.

The two-day conference has brought together representatives from the UN, governments, the private sector and civil society, with the common goal of setting new directions for global transport efforts.

Putting humanity first

Mr. Ban noted that the transport sector transcends economics, indeed, it has a human side, and “we should all be concerned about people who do not have the access they deserve.”

“Sustainable transport is out of reach for too many rural communities. Millions of persons with disabilities cannot use public transportation because it is inaccessible. Older persons struggle to move from one place to the next. Even where transport is available it may not be safe – especially for women and girls, who often rightly fear they may be attacked,” he explained.

In this respect, the Secretary-General highlighted the critical importance of sustainable transport, noting that it has to answer to the needs of those who have the least. “When it does, we can bridge more than physical distances; we can come closer as one human family,” he underscored.
We need a broad view that resolves interlocking problems of transport with an integrated policy framework. This has to align with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Further highlighting the heavy toll of unsustainable transport on human life, Mr. Ban said road accidents claim about one and a quarter million lives every year. “The vast majority – nine out of 10 – is in developing countries,” he said, also noting that city traffic saps productivity. Further, transport contributes to air pollution, which costs more than three million lives a year.

Mr. Ban noted that the answer to such challenges “is not less transport – it is sustainable transport […] we need more systems that are environmentally friendly, affordable and accessible. Technological advances can get us there.”

Seven ideas for sustainable transport

The Secretary-General went on to outline seven ideas for sustainable transport, including the need for an integrated policy framework that aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“Second, we must address the needs of vulnerable countries, including least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States,” he said, noting that those countries need simplified border crossings and harmonized regional regulations and requirements.

The third idea, Mr. Ban said, was the need to promote better transport systems in cities. “That means improving public transport while promoting walking and cycling,” he said.

He also highlighted the need to make all transport systems safe and secure “to reach the ambitious target set in the 2030 Agenda calling for access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all.”

Calling for bold and innovative steps in re-thinking transport systems, from design, to technology and consumption patterns, the UN chief stated, as his fifth idea, the need to address the environmental impacts of transport in order to mitigate the impact on climate change and reduce local air pollution.

Mr. Ban underscored that all these ideas need financing, noting, “it takes investments to see results.”

“That means mobilizing funds from a variety of sources and fostering North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation. Public-private partnerships are indispensable,” he explained.

Lastly, Mr. Ban highlighted, as his seventh idea, the importance of partnerships, saying: “We have to mobilize all partners by putting people at the centre of transport planning – and by working together. Transport is team work.”

As this will be the final international conference he is convening as UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban said he is happy to end his term by focusing on sustainable transport, telling delegations that he is confident the international community as “the resolve, commitment, imagination and creativity to transform our transport systems in a sustainable manner that will improve human wellbeing, enhance social progress and protect our planet Earth.”

New UN House opens in Ashgabat

Later in the day, Mr. Ban took part in a ribbon cutting ceremony for the opening of the new UN House in Ashgabat, where he noted that the Government of Turkmenistan has worked tirelessly with the UN over the past 16 months to renovate the building to ensure it meets the highest standards.

“This new UN House is a great example for other countries around the world,” said the Secretary-General, thanking President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov for his commitment to providing the facility, as well as his support to its maintenance in the coming years.

Calling the grand structure “a powerful symbol of the strong partnership between Turkmenistan and the United Nations,”
Mr. Ban noted that many members of the UN family are working with the Government and people of Turkmenistan: led by the UN Resident Coordinator, together with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), The UN office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International organization for Migration (IOM), UN Women, the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), as well as the World Bank.

“I count on our staff to open the doors of this UN House wide to many partners, especially from civil society,” he said, stressing that by supporting the activities of civil society, securing human rights and promoting fundamental freedoms, “we can realize true progress. This also demands full equality and true empowerment for women and girls.”