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Latest round of UN-led global consultations spotlights migrants' contributions to development

A Syrian family is successfully interviewed by Canadian officials through the help of an International Organization for Migration (IOM) interpreter at a resettlement programme carried out in Jordan. Photo: IOM (file)

24 July – Although the net benefits of migration far outweigh its costs, the public perception is often the opposite, a senior United Nations official pointed out today, as the latest round of consultations on a global compact for migration began in New York.

“Such public perceptions and attitudes negatively influence sound migration policy choices,” said Louise Arbour, UN Special Representative for International Migration, in her remarks to the session, which wraps up tomorrow at UN Headquarters in New York.

“This must be reversed so that policy is evidence-based and not perception-driven. Policies responding to false perceptions reinforce the apparent validity of these erroneous stereotypes and make recourse to proper policies that much harder,” she added.

The consultation is the fourth in a series of six thematic consultations that will take place this year and feed into the drafting of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), expected to be adopted by UN Member States in 2018.

An outgrowth of the New York Declaration, adopted at a 2016 UN Summit on refugees and migrants, the Compact will be



the first intergovernmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the UN, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a comprehensive manner.

The current consultation, conducted by representatives of Member States, UN agencies, civil society, migrants and diaspora, examines the challenges and opportunities in leveraging the economic and social contributions of migrants to countries of origin and destination.

Ms. Arbour pointed out that in 2016 migrants sent \$429 billion to their countries of origin – one of their most tangible contributions to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in developing countries.

More than three times larger than official development assistance (ODA), and more stable than other forms of private capital flows, remittances – as such transfers are known – to developing countries have lifted millions of families out of poverty, she said, while stressing the need to lower the associated transaction costs to leverage remittances for development.

Migration also provides substantial development benefits to places of destination, for both developed and developing countries, particularly through the contribution of labour migrants of all skills levels, she argued.

However, there can be upfront adjustment costs in the short term that need to be addressed, she added.

In his remarks, Director General of International Organization for Migration (IOM) William Lacy Swing emphasized the advantages of making sure migration is considered in development planning.

He cited the need to ensure that migration is seen as an issue affecting all aspects of human development, including human rights, and the importance of mainstreaming migration in the broader development strategy.

Afghanistan: UN condemns attack on civilians in Kabul

24 July – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres condemned today's bomb attack in the Afghan capital of Kabul, warning that attacks on civilians may constitute a war crime.

In a statement from his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres expressed his deepest sympathy to the families of those killed, and reaffirmed the UN's solidarity with the people and Government.

He also stressed that “the deliberate targeting of civilians constitutes a grave violation of human rights and international humanitarian law and may constitute a war crime.”

Also today, a senior official from the UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) called the attack “cowardly.”

“I am personally outraged by all attacks against civilians,” said Pernille Kardel, the UN Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan. “The detonation of another large suicide device in a busy, civilian-populated area is egregious, cowardly and bereft of humanity.”

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the suicide attack in the Ghulayee Dawa Khan area of Kabul, which killed more than 20 civilians and injured more than 40, the UN Assistance Mission (UNAMA) said.

The attackers targeted a bus carrying civil servants to work during morning rush hour in the city.

Suicide attacks are the leading cause of civilians casualties this year, according to UNAMA's midyear report on civilian protection released last week.



A street scene in Kabul, Afghanistan. Photo UNAMA/Fardin Waezi

Today's attack came amid planned commemorations for the 23 July 2016 Dehmazang square attack which killed and injured hundreds of people, many from the so-called Enlightened Movement, a coalition of civil society activities, protesting for Hazara minority rights.

“In the context of so much suffering and death, I wish to commend members of the Enlightenment Movement for choosing to address their grievances resulting from last year's attack through dialogue, not violence,” said Ms. Kardel, who is the acting chief of UNAMA.

Australia's offshore refugee processing causes 'extensive suffering' and must end, says UN agency chief

24 July – Four years on, Australia's offshore processing has left some 2,000 people languishing in unacceptable circumstances – causing physical and psychological harm, according to the United Nations refugee agency, which today called for an immediate end to the practice.

“Australia's policy of offshore processing in Papua New Guinea and Nauru, which denies access to asylum in Australia for refugees arriving by sea without a valid visa, has caused extensive, avoidable suffering for far too long,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said today in a statement.

In light of the dire humanitarian situation that includes separating families, last November the High Commissioner's Office, UNHCR, exceptionally agreed to help relocate refugees to the United States following a bilateral agreement between that country and Australia.

“We agreed to do so on the clear understanding that vulnerable refugees with close family ties in Australia would ultimately be allowed to settle there,” Mr. Grandi explained.

However, Australia recently informed UNHCR that it refuses to accept the refugees, and that they, along with those on Nauru and Papua New Guinea, were told that their only option is to remain where they are or be transferred to Cambodia or the US.

This new information bars people from receiving the support of family residing in Australia – including for those who have undergone traumatic experiences, counting sexual violence, and those with serious medical conditions.

“To avoid prolonging their ordeal, UNHCR has no other choice but to endorse the relocation of all refugees on Papua New Guinea and Nauru to the United States, even those with close family members in Australia,” said Mr. Grandi.

“There is no doubt these vulnerable people, already subject to four years of punishing conditions, should be reunited with their families in Australia. This is the humane and reasonable thing to do,” he added.

The High Commissions reminded the Australian Government that its decision to deny these people the possibility is “contrary to the fundamental principles of family unity and refugee protection, and to common decency.”

Underscoring that UNHCR fully endorses the need to save lives at sea and provide alternatives to dangerous journeys and exploitation by smugglers, Mr. Grandi underscored that the practice of offshore processing has had a hugely detrimental impact.

“There is a fundamental contradiction in saving people at sea, only to mistreat and neglect them on land,” maintained the UN refugee agency chief.



Australia will relocate refugees currently being held at this social centre on the Pacific island of Nauru to Cambodia. Photo: UNHCR/N. Wright

“Australia has a proud humanitarian tradition, manifested in its support for overseas aid and its longstanding refugee resettlement programme. I urge Australia to bring an immediate end to the harmful practice of offshore processing, offer solutions to its victims, for whom it retains full responsibility, and work with us on future alternatives that save lives at sea and provide protection to people in need,” stressed Mr. Grandi.

He concluded by pointing out that at a time of record global levels of displacement, “it is crucial that all States offer protection to survivors of war and persecution, and not outsource their responsibilities to others. Refugees, our fellow human beings, deserve as much.”

UN chief condemns killing of peacekeeper in Central African Republic



A commander of the anti-Balaka militia collects weapons handed in by children released by the group during a release ceremony in Bambari in the Central African Republic. Photo: UNICEF/ Le Du

24 July – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned the killing of a UN peacekeeper on Sunday in the Central African Republic, urging the country's authorities to investigate this incident and bring the perpetrators to justice.

“The Secretary-General is appalled by attacks against United Nations peacekeepers,” said Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General, in a statement issued overnight.

A Moroccan peacekeeper of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) was killed in the south-eastern city of Bangassou in an attack allegedly carried out by anti-Balaka militias. Three others were injured.

The Secretary-General “is deeply concerned” about the continued fighting in the country's southeast and calls on all parties to cease violence, the spokesperson said, noting that the UN chief offered his condolences to the bereaved family and to the Government of Morocco, and wished speedy recovery to those injured.

UN chief Guterres strongly condemns terrorist attack in Pakistan's Lahore

24 July – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today strongly condemned the terrorist attack in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore and called for those responsible to be brought to justice, his spokesman said.

“The Secretary-General extends his condolences to the families of the victims and wishes full recovery to those injured,” said Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General, in a statement.

According to preliminary media reports, at least 26 people were killed in an alleged suicide bombing that targeted police officers guarding a demolition site at Kot Lakhpat's vegetable market.



Secretary-General António Guterres. UN Photo/Mark Garten (file)

The Secretary-General “supports the efforts of the Government of Pakistan to fight terrorism and violent extremism with full respect for international human rights norms and obligations,” Mr. Haq added.

Security Council cites terrorism, deteriorating humanitarian conditions as challenges for West Africa



Diffa, the Niger's poorest region, has been affected by the increased violence in Nigeria, conducted by the armed group Boko Haram, increasingly expanding and targeting the civilian population in Niger - and Diffa region in particular. More than 135 displacement sites have been noted along the border with Nigeria. Photo: UNICEF/Cherkaoui

24 July – The Security Council today welcomed recent positive political developments in some West African countries, but expressed concern over the threat of terrorism in the region.

“The Security Council strongly condemns all terrorist attacks carried out in the region, in particular in Northern and Central Mali and the Lake Chad Basin region, notably by Boko Haram and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),” said the Security Council President for the month of July, Liu Jieyi, in a presidential statement.

On behalf of the Council, Mr. Liu expressed particular concern over attacks on civilians – the primary victims of terrorist violence – while underscoring the importance of a holistic approach to degrade and defeat the terrorists in compliance with international law.

“The Security Council encourages Member States and multilateral partners to lend their support to the MNJTF (Multinational Joint Task Force) to ensure its full operationalization, including the provision of

modalities to increase the timely and effective exchange of intelligence to further the region's collective efforts to combat Boko Haram, whenever possible and appropriate,” said the statement.

The Council underscored its commitment to work through the UN Office in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to strengthen cooperation in addressing cross-border security threats and curbing the spread of terrorism.

“The Security Council notes the collaboration undertaken between UNOWAS and the Peacebuilding Commission and encourages continued close and effective cooperation in support of sustainable peace in the region,” the statement stressed.

In tandem, it referenced the dire humanitarian situation caused by the terrorists' activities in the Lake Chad Basin region and called the international community to “immediately support the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance for the people most affected by the crisis in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria,” including by fulfilling the UN appeal for the Lake Chad Basin region.

The Council also urged regional governments to facilitate humanitarian access and to work with the UN in developing aid delivery options.

Turning to Côte d'Ivoire, the Council welcomed the progress made on peace, stability and economic prosperity following the 30 June closure of the UN Operation in the country (UNOCI) and emphasized the importance of UNOWAS' engagement during the transition period.

Concerned about piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, as well as the trafficking of humans, drugs and other illicit goods, the Council stressed the need to strengthen the fight against illicit activities in the sub-region.

The statement welcomed West African leadership in spearheading initiatives addressing terrorism challenges and encouraged collaboration between Member States, regional and sub-regional organizations, the UN and other stakeholders “to enhance social cohesion and to address challenges to good governance.”

It also welcomed positive political developments in several West African countries, particularly the free and transparent legislative elections on 6 April in the Gambia – commending the diplomatic efforts by ECOWAS Heads of State that resulted in the peaceful transition of power to the democratically elected President Adama Barrow.

The Council encouraged “bilateral and multilateral partners to provide appropriate support to the efforts of the Government of the Gambia to restore the rule of law, reconciliation, and development for the citizens of the Gambia.”

Back from visit to Myanmar, independent UN rights expert says situation 'worsening'



Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar Yanghee Lee. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

24 July – While no one expects an overnight transition to democracy in Myanmar, there has to be real progress on human rights, an independent United Nations expert today said, highlighting reported killings, tortures, and an “ongoing humanitarian crisis” for the Rohingya people and other minorities.

In a statement from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee accused national authorities of “presiding over a worsening security and human rights situation” in the country.

Ms. Lee said she catalogued a list of concerns during her 12 day visit to the country, which was held at the invitation of the Government, which also included the use of human shields by security forces and deaths in custody.

“I am disappointed to see the tactics applied by the previous Government still being used,” said Ms. Lee, who wrapped up her visit on 21 July.

“We are told not to expect Myanmar to transition into a democracy overnight – that it needs time and space,” she continued. “But in the same way, Myanmar should not expect to have its close scrutiny removed or its special monitoring mechanisms dismantled overnight. This cannot happen until there is real and discernible progress on human rights.”

The independent expert also raised concern about the situation of the Rohingya people, and said that State protection and security extend “not only to the Rakhine but also the Muslim communities.”

In Kachin and Rakhine states, some 100,000 and 120,000 people, respectively, have remained displaced for more than five years following the eruption of inter-communal conflict between Buddhists and minority Muslim Rohingya.

Ms. Lee said she was particularly dismayed to learn that the situation in northern Shan State was deteriorating, with reports of more conflict, alleged rights violations by security forces and armed groups, and inadequate assistance for civilians.

“There have been numerous reports of killings, torture, even the use of human shields by the armed forces, allegedly in some cases accompanied by threats of further violence if incidents are reported,” said Ms. Lee.

The Special Rapporteur, who visited Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw as well as parts of Rakhine, Shan and Kayin States, said she had been “astonished” at Government attempts to limit her activities and movements.

The Special Rapporteur also highlighted the confiscation of land to create so-called Special Economic Zones, where land has been confiscated but some farmers still have to pay tax on it.

Ms. Lee will present a full report on her visit to the UN General Assembly in October 2017.

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

Ahead of October elections, UN Council urges Liberia to plan for safe, credible polls

24 July – With Liberian officials responsible for security in the country, the United Nations Security Council today encouraged the Government to put in place an election security plan for the October polls.

The 15-member Council agreed a presidential statement – which is similar in tone to a resolution but not legally binding – commending the Liberian Government “for progress towards restoring peace, security and stability” in the country.

The statement notes that plans are underway for the presidential and legislative elections to be held in October 2017, and urges that they be “free, fair, credible, and transparent” and include full participation of women.

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, whose two terms end this year, has reassured the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that the polls will be peaceful.

In addition to concerns for safety during the polls, girls and women in the country continue to face “high incidence” of sexual and gender-based violence, said the statement signed by Ambassador Liu Jieyi, who holds the rotating presidency for the month of July.

The Council notes that given the transfer of security responsibilities for Liberia's security services on 30 June 2016, the Government should create a plan for the elections, and provide adequate resources behind the plan.

Among other issues raised in the statement was the need for Liberian officials to expand efforts to address the root causes of conflict in the country, to reinvigorate the reconciliation process, and to promote land reform.

“The Security Council encourages the Government of Liberia to accelerate its accountability and transparency efforts to bolster public confidence in advance of elections and transfer of power, and stresses the need for the Government to honour its commitment to support the passage of the Land Rights Bill and the Local Government Bill,” according to the statement.

The approval of the bills would have a positive impact on people's lives and contribute to overcoming societal and structural inequalities which helped to lead to the conflict.



A man has his finger dipped in ink after voting in national elections in Liberia on 11 October 2011

Amid rising violence in Jerusalem, UN and diplomatic partners urge maximum restraint on all sides



The Damascus Gate, one of the main entrances to the Old City of Jerusalem. UN Photo/ John Isaac

23 July – Expressing deep concern about the escalating tensions and violent clashes taking place in and around the Old City of Jerusalem, the United Nations and its diplomatic partners in the Middle East peace process have called on all to demonstrate maximum restraint and work towards de-escalating the situation.

In a statement issued late yesterday, the envoys of the so-called Middle East Quartet – comprising the UN, Russia, the United States and the European Union – strongly condemned acts of terror, and expressed regret for all loss of innocent life caused by the violence, and hope for a speedy recovery to the wounded.

The statement comes in the wake of a series of deadly stabbings, other violent incidents and rising tensions in and around Jerusalem's Old City since mid-June, particularly near the holy site known as the

Temple Mount and as Haram al-Sharif.

Noting the particular sensitivities surrounding the holy sites in Jerusalem, and the need to ensure security, the Quartet envoys called on all to demonstrate maximum restraint, refrain from provocative actions and work towards de-escalating the situation.

Through their statement, the envoys welcomed the assurances by the Prime Minister of Israel that the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem will be upheld and respected. Further, the Quartet encouraged Israel and Jordan to work together to uphold the status quo, noting Jordan's special role as recognized in its peace treaty with Israel.

The Quartet envoys reiterated that violence deepens mistrust and is fundamentally incompatible with achieving a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the statement concluded.

'The time to act is now;' end children's suffering in Iraq and across the Middle East – UNICEF



A five year-old boy carries an empty water jerry in Al-hol camp in north-eastern Syria, hosting over 4,600 Iraqi refugees. Like most children there, he bears the brunt of carrying water for his family. UNICEF/Souliman

22 July – Calling for “immediate care and protection” for children caught up in violence in Iraq's war torn Mosul and other Middle East conflicts, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) today warned that the lives and futures of some 27 million across the region and parts of Africa are at risk.

“The worst of the violence in Mosul may be over but for too many children in Mosul and in the region, “extreme suffering continues,” said, Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

As for recently-liberated Mosul, he said that children in shock continue to be found, some reportedly among the debris or hidden in tunnels. Some have lost their families while fleeing to safety. According to reports, families have been forced to abandon their children or give them away – they are now living in fear, alone.

“Many children have been forced to fight and some to carry out acts of extreme violence,” he said, emphasizing: “These are

horrific times for far too many children in Iraq and other conflict-affected countries in the region.”

UNICEF says that violence and conflicts are putting the lives and futures of nearly 27 million children at risk, impacted by violence in Yemen, inside Syria and refugee hosting countries, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Libya and Sudan, as well as Iraq.

“In the north-eastern city of Ar-Raqqa in Syria, violence has further intensified over the past weeks, with children repeatedly coming under attack. Between 30,000 and 50,000 civilians continue to be trapped in the city as heavy violence continues around them,” Mr. Cappelaere explained.

Moreover, families have described horrific conditions and journeys fraught with danger, sniper fire, landmines and unexploded remnants of war, he added.

Such horrors are not over even if children escape from immediate danger. They are being detained, abused and stigmatized for perceived affiliations, while tensions are high between and within communities, said Mr. Cappelaere.

“Those children who are alone need our support to help them find their families, be reunited and surrounded with care, protection and services, regardless of their family's origin or affiliation,” he underscored.

“As with any other child in the world, they have the right to be safeguarded, including through legal documentation. Children are children!”

The time to act is now, Mr. Cappelaere said, and asked: “How can we build a more stable and prosperous future for all while children are exposed to such horrors and treated this way?”

Guterres 'strongly condemns' stabbing attack that left three Israelis dead in West Bank

22 July – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has strongly condemned yesterday evening's stabbing attack by a Palestinian perpetrator, which resulted in the death of three members of an Israeli family in the Halamish settlement in the occupied West Bank.

“He conveys his condolences to the bereaved and wishes a speedy recovery to those injured,” according to a statement issued by the UN chief's Deputy Spokesman, Farhan Haq.

Furth to the statement, Mr. Guterres again called on all to refrain from any actions or words that could further escalate an already volatile situation.



Halamish, an Israeli settlement, stands in the northern West Bank, near the Palestinian village of Nabih Saleh. Photo: UNICEF/Mouhssine Ennaimi