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With annual general debate over, time has come for action, UN Assembly President says

25 September – The United Nations General Assembly wrapped up its 72nd annual general debate today, with its President underscoring prevention of conflicts before they break out, support for UN peacekeeping, sustainable development, and respect for human rights and gender equality among the major priorities raised by the 196 Heads of State, Government and delegations.

“You reaffirmed your commitment to the UN. And to each other. You said we are stronger together, in a system based on dialogue and multilateralism,” President Miroslav Lajčák declared in the vaulted Assembly Hall before the golden column with the UN logo of a world globe, which served as the backdrop for all 196 speakers.

“And you stressed that any alternative would risk repeating the mistakes of history,” he added, while noting that not all the messages delivered were positive, with many criticizing other countries or the UN.

“But that is part of the package. It is your right to do this. And regardless of size, or population, or economy, all delegations have access to the same platform, for the same amount of time. They can speak freely, without censorship,” he said, summing up the main thrust of the debate whose theme was ‘Focusing on People – Striving for Peace and a Decent Life for All on a Sustainable Planet.’



General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak at the closing of the general debate. UN Photo/Cia Pak

“We addressed many challenges over the past week. You talked about their impact on the countries of the world. Importantly, you also talked about their impact on people. We heard about people running from gunshots – or the force of exploding bombs. People living for a week on the same amount some of us spend on a cup of coffee,” he said.

“People forced to make the decision between risking their lives to stay, or risking their lives to flee. People wondering when the next hurricane will hit, or if their village will be under water in a few decades. People who are beginning to lose – or have already lost– hope in international peace processes. And people still waiting for justice and human rights to become a part of their daily reality.”

Turning to the work that lies ahead for the Assembly’s 72nd Session, Mr. Lajčák cited several milestones, including the high-level event on Sustaining Peace, in April, the adoption of Global Compacts related to Migrants and Refugees next September, and the High-level meeting on human trafficking this week.

In UN address, Venezuela decries effects of capitalism as enemy of Mother Nature

25 September – Echoing the sentiments of other speakers from the Latin American and Caribbean, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela, Jorge Arreaza Montserrat, told the United Nations today that countries in the region are suffering extreme weather and climate catastrophes due to rampant consumption and consumerism in which they played no part.

Calling for adherence to the principle of ‘shared and differentiated’ responsibility when tackling climate change, Jorge Arreaza Montserrat, voiced solidarity with those affected by recent natural disasters, noting that such events had made millions of people victims of “a war they did not choose; this is the war of the developed countries and their capitalist system against Mother Nature.”

Indeed, he said: “Let us not change the climate, let us change the system.” The responsibility must not fall on developing countries alone; it was especially unfair for the United States – the world’s largest emitter – to withdraw from the Paris Agreement.

He went on to say that while the UN is a “noble instrument” intended to serve as a podium for discussion of pressing issues like the State of the planet it nevertheless played host to “arrogant powers” such as the US, which “desecrated, disrespected and offended [this] the house for peace.” He said Venezuela’s people had been directly threatened by President Donald Trump, including by military threats and the imposition of unilateral sanctions.

While Venezuela would always deal with the United States and other nations through mutual respect, it was nevertheless prepared to defend itself “in any way,” he stressed.

As for the situation in his country, Mr. Arreaza said democracy in Venezuela is “active and popular” and the “violence of the opposition” had been eased after the July 30 elections in which Venezuelans went to vote to choose to the members of the National Constituent Assembly.

“Total political peace returned to the country from July 31. Our National Constituent Assembly is [in line] with the rest of the constituted powers,” he explained, calling it an instrument for national dialogue and dealing with the most urgent problems of the country.



Jorge Arreaza, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly’s seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

Timor-Leste is vivid example of what UN can do in peacebuilding, Assembly debate told

25 September – Timor-Leste, a country which the United Nations shepherded to independence from Indonesia 15 years ago, stands as a shining example of what the world Organization can achieve in establishing peace and stability, the country's president told the General Assembly today.

“The recent history of Timor-Leste vividly reminds us that when civil values, on which the very existence of the United Nations is built, take the lead – and inspire decisions – in the international scene, the UN and international law become powerful and decisive forces to settle conflicts and restore peace,” Francisco Guterres Lú Olo said in a speech read by Delegation Chair Maria Helena Pires.

Actions by Portugal, Indonesia, Australia, and the United States, and the support of the European Union and other world powers, are “living proof of the United Nations’ ability to save lives and help make the world a safe place,” he stressed.

He highlighted his country's advances since independence in 2002 in peacebuilding and reconciliation at both national and international levels, sustainable development, health, education, and gender equality.



Maria Helena Lopes de Jesus Pires, Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste to the United Nations, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

In UN Assembly address, Angola emphasises its 'decisive' role in multilateralism



Ismael Martins, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Angola to the United Nations, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

25 September – Underscoring the importance of multilateralism in solving global tensions, Angola told the United Nations General Assembly about its strong engagement and “decisive” role in restoring peace and security in the region, with its commitment for economic development and democratic society.

“Angola's attachment to multilateralism is strongly emphasized in its role in solving problems [...] particularly in the Great Lakes Region,” Ismael Abraão Gaspar Martins, Permanent Representative of Angola to the UN and head of the country's delegation, told the Assembly's 72nd annual general debate, adding that Angola has been leading diplomatic efforts with its regional and international partners to find a lasting political solution.

“We are increasingly able and fit to play a decisive role in restoring peace and security, particularly in Africa, and in furthering its economic development,” said Mr. Gaspar Martins.

He further stressed that his country's recent peaceful election has shown stability and a gradual consolidation of democracy.

As a new cycle of Government begins, economic development will be one of the priorities for Angola and it is strongly engaged in achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda, which are crucial for building a prosperous and democratic society, said Mr. Gaspar Martins.

At UN Assembly, Nicaragua underscores dialogue and negotiation as way to peace



María Rubiales de Chamorro, Permanent Representative of Nicaragua to the United Nations, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

25 September – The Permanent Representative of Nicaragua to the United Nations, María Rubiales de Chamorro, addressed the General Assembly's annual debate today, reflecting on the political will and action that must be undertaken to achieve a better and peaceful world.

"We must assume the commitment to continue fighting for peace, which is a global priority, of our peoples, and that the conflicts that arise in different regions of our planet can be overcome, through dialogue, through negotiation and, above all, free from the use or threat of use of force, which is what our peoples desire most, from the peoples of the great powers, to the peoples with small populations, small in development, but great, great in their values and in their history," she quoted the President.

Turning to UN reform, she pointed out that after 72 years, "our Organization has not been able to fully comply with the objectives set out in its Charter," saying that a "re-foundation" is urgently needed, including transformations of the Security Council to ensure that its composition and function reflects the geopolitical and economic realities.

Ms. Rubiales de Chamorro also underscored that ambitious actions are urgently needed to combat climate change. Concerned about the unprecedented record temperatures reached at the global level, she said "Developed countries must take the lead and change their unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and meet their financial commitments and technology transfers."

Noting that her country signed the Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty, she underscored that verbal confrontation and threats of using nuclear weapons are unacceptable. "There is a need to advance in the commitment to eliminate nuclear arsenals in the world, until they disappear from our planet and utilize these enormous resources for the eradication of poverty," she stressed.

At UN Assembly, Turkmenistan stresses importance for greater global cooperation



Aksoltan T. Ataeva, Permanent Representative of Turkmenistan to the United Nations, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

25 September – Speaking at the 72nd annual debate at the United Nations General Assembly, Turkmenistan highlighted its efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and called for greater cooperation to address the challenges before the globe.

In her address, Aksoltan Ataeva, the Chair of the Delegation of Turkmenistan, noted the importance of transport connectivity and cooperation for the achievement of the global development goals and informed the Assembly of the global conference on sustainable transport held in the country last November.

Also in her remarks, Ms. Ataeva noted the establishment of a training centre in the country to strengthen capacity in relation to the implementation of the SDGs. She also underscored the importance of energy security and in ensuring fair access to energy, including as part

of the 2030 Agenda.

She also highlighted the importance of sports as a driver of peace, understanding and human rights, and in that context, recalled the participation of the Refugee Olympic Team at the Rio Olympics 2016.

Further in her address the head of the delegation of Turkmenistan noted the challenges posed by terrorism to all countries around the globe and, welcoming the role played by the UN in combatting the scourge, expressed her support for reforms at the Organization, including review of the method of its work and to react to threats in the modern world.

United Nations ‘backbone’ of global order, stresses Norway at Assembly



Tore Hattrem, Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly’s seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

25 September – Underscoring that the “unprecedented” progress achieved by human kind over the last decades cannot be taken for granted, Norway called for continued international cooperation to safeguard the achievements and to ensure that they remain sustainable.

“Protectionism and isolationism will reverse our common development. We need more trade and cooperation – not less,” said Tore Hattrem, the Chairperson of the Delegation of Norway at the 72nd annual general debate of the United Nations General Assembly.

The world cannot afford to “shake the very foundations” that its open, global economic order is based on, he added.

In his remarks, Mr. Hattrem stressed that the United Nations is the “backbone” of the global order, noting, in his words that a strong and healthy back is needed to address and resolve the challenges the world is facing today.

“But we know that we can do it together.”

He also urged continued commitment for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 4, on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Norway’s head of delegation also noted that the country has actively supported the UN since it was founded, and expressed his support to Secretary-General António Guterres’ vision for the Organization.

New Zealand, at General Assembly, urges reformed UN to 'do better' to solve global problems



Craig John Hawke, Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

25 September – The United Nations is crucial to tackling the plethora of problems confronting the world – from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) nuclear programme to global development and climate change – but it can and must do better, New Zealand told the General Assembly's 72nd annual general debate today.

“The United Nations is unique in its ability to convene the world in order to tackle problems that require collective action,” the Head of Delegation Craig Hawke said. “Widely recognized rules, buttressed by an effective United Nations, are the best guarantors of our security and our economic well-being, particularly for small States.”

Guarantees are also the best means of ensuring decent treatment and decent conditions for the world's citizens, thereby reducing conditions that lead to unrest, conflict and misery, he added.

“But we all recognize that the United Nations can do better, and to do so must be

more relevant, effective and fit for purpose,” he declared, noting that Secretary-General António Guterres's reform agenda provides an opportunity to make this a reality.

“Important work lies ahead for us to reform the development and peace and security pillars. The United Nations needs to invest a much greater proportion of its resources and effort in preventing conflict, rather than focusing primarily on the consequences of conflict,” he concluded, calling for management reform.

“It is our sincere hope that reform can achieve our collective goal of better reflecting the ideals of the UN Charter and, ultimately, ensuring that the UN delivers better outcomes for our generation and those to come.”

At General Assembly, Mozambique calls for reformed UN, greater aid from wealthy States



António Gumende, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Mozambique to the United Nations, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

25 September – Only a reformed United Nations and a greater commitment from wealthier countries to help the developing world can confront “the overwhelming challenges of our times,” Mozambique told the General Assembly on the last day of its 72nd annual general debate today.

“We live in a world confronted by challenges that demand global responses,” Delegation Chairman Antonio Gumande said. “The relevance of the UN, the lodestar of multilateralism, over the last 72 years of its existence has always rested in its ability to reform and reinvent itself to respond more suitably to the challenges of continuously changing world it serves.”

He warned that “multiple and complex challenges threaten to constrain gains already made in fostering global peace and stability, stall and reverse advances made in fostering social and economic wellbeing, and cause irreversible damages to our planet.



“The experiences we gained and the challenges we faced in the implementation of other globally agreed development goals in the past underline the need for a greater commitment of our development partners to scale-up and honour their assistance and for funding pledges made for climate resilience, mitigation and adaptation, as well as for disaster prevention efforts,” he stressed.

“This support is of paramount importance to mitigate the effects of climate variability whose devastating effects have been laid bare in several Member States of this august body in the last two months,” he said.

Allow people to be ‘dignified agents of their own destiny,’ Holy See tells UN debate



Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for the Relations with States of the Holy See, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly’s seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

25 September – The Observer of the Holy See, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary of Relations with States, speaking on the final day of the United Nations General Assembly’s annual debate praised this year’s theme – ‘Focusing on People: Striving for peace and a decent life on a sustainable planet’ – saying that Pope Francis “never tires of insisting on people first, especially those who suffer, those who are excluded, marginalized and left behind.”

The Archbishop underscored the importance of protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms as the foundation of peace, security and integral human development. The Holy See sees reforming the UN development system as an additional opportunity to place people at the centre of its actions, recounting the Pope’s message to ‘allow them to be dignified agents of their own destiny.’

Turning to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change, he said that while Pope Francis defined the Agenda as an “important sign of hope,” he warned against “assuaged consciences,” saying: “We must not rest until the legal commitments have been truly accomplished and the political promises have been fulfilled in the lives of people.”

The duty to prevent wars and violent conflicts is an essential component of the ‘responsibility to protect,’ he continued. Against that backdrop, the Archbishop stressed the need for an environment of trust saying that “prevention requires, first of all, restoring faith in the capacity of humankind for dialogue.” He encouraged all countries to take urgent steps back from military preparations, exhorting that “all the diplomatic and political means of mediation should be engaged to avoid the unspeakable.”

Another great challenge facing the international community is trafficking in persons. The Archbishop pointed to conflicts, extreme poverty, underdevelopment and exclusion along with the lack of education and employment as being at the root of this and other contemporary forms of slavery.

“Pope Francis calls on all, in particular the competent authorities, to address such a heinous crime through effective juridical instruments, to punish those who profit from it, to assist the healing and the reintegration of its victims, and to eradicate its root causes,” he stated, adding “our response must be commensurate to this great evil of our time.”

Uruguay joins other nations addressing General Assembly in calling for stronger, more flexible UN



Rodolfo Nin Novoa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

25 September – In his speech to the General Assembly's annual general debate, Rodolfo Nin Novoa, Foreign Minister of Uruguay, said strengthened international coordination bodies are needed more than ever, urging respect for the principle of sovereignty.

“The United Nations must become stronger,” and the General Assembly must gain greater prominence, he said. He noted that Uruguay's foreign policy is based on the pillars of democracy, human rights, the defence of international law, and pursuit of peace. Such principles retained prominence despite the changes of political power in the country, he said, underscoring Uruguay's commitment to making its voice heard on the international stage.

More broadly, he noted that unprecedented violence, arms proliferation, and the increase in terrorism, cyberattacks, hunger and climate change require a strong commitment from the international community. Today, millions are affected by armed conflict, with hundreds of thousands killed and millions displaced. “We should not get used to standing idly by,” he stressed.

He urged all countries to increase efforts to combat human trafficking, and ensure development and social growth, citing inequality and the persistence of international forces as drivers of those threats. He expressed support for the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, noting that Uruguay had recently presented its Voluntary National Report to the Economic and Social Council's High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

He urged all countries to increase efforts to combat human trafficking, and ensure development and social growth, citing inequality and the persistence of international forces as drivers of those threats. He expressed support for the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, noting that Uruguay had recently presented its Voluntary National Report to the Economic and Social Council's High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Peru, at UN, calls for more inclusive globalization based on multilateralism and dialogue



Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations, addresses the general debate of the General Assembly's seventy-second session. UN Photo/Cia Pak

25 September – Underscoring Peru's endurance in its combat against terrorism, corruption, as well as its vulnerability to the effects of climate change, the country's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, said today that the Organization is fundamental for a “peaceful and sustainable” future in Peru, the region and beyond.

Enduring such challenges, he said in his address to the General Assembly's annual debate, therefore means Peru welcomed special attention given to sustainable peace, and prevention of humanitarian crises, adding that access to weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups “is a real threat.”

In addressing issues of climate change, he reaffirmed the nation's commitment to the Paris Agreement, and the progress it could mean for a coastal country inundated by torrential rains wrought by El Nino, and the losses of biodiversity and ecosystems to extreme weather phenomena.

Turning to the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Ambassador Cuadra expressed concern about the threat of corruption at the global level, calling it an attack that “erodes democratic governance and legal stability of our countries.” He said corruption “triggers disenchantment and distrust in institutions, and bolsters inequality.”

Expressing concern for neighboring Venezuela during this heightened time of social instability, he said that while the

answer to resolving the country's crisis lies with Venezuelans themselves, the issue nevertheless requires international solidarity and support.

In Bangladesh, UN refugee chief warns influx of Rohingya outpaces capacities to respond



Newly arrived Rohingya refugees sit at Shamlapur beach in Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh, after traveling for five hours in a boat across the open waters of the Bay of Bengal. Photo: UNICEF/Brown

25 September – The United Nations refugee chief today called for ramped-up support for an estimated 436,000 Rohingya refugees who have fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar in the last month, warning that the massive influx of people seeking safety far outpaces capacities to respond.

“Their situation remains desperate, and we risk a dramatic deterioration if aid is not rapidly stepped up,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said in a press release, following a visit yesterday to Kutupalong refugee camp and other areas along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border where people have made their own shelters on tiny slivers of land.

“Despite every effort by those on the ground, the massive influx of people seeking safety rapidly outpaced capacities to respond, and the situation has still not stabilised. More is needed, and fast, if we are to

avoid further deterioration,” Mr. Grandi said.

UNHCR has now airlifted three planes loaded with relief items into the country, and is distributing emergency shelter kits, kitchen sets and solar lamps.

Its experts are working closely with the Government of Bangladesh to set up an organised site with water, sanitation and other facilities, and to register the new arrivals. Other international agencies and civil society partners are also on the ground.

Mr. Grandi arrived in Bangladesh on Saturday to see conditions for himself. He spoke with families living in the camp near Cox's Bazar.

“They had seen villages burned down, families shot or hacked to death, women and girls brutalized. Many of the refugees said they would like to go home, but there needs to be an end to violence, and a restoration of rights inside Myanmar,” Mr. Grandi said.

“Solutions to this crisis lie within Myanmar. But for now, our immediate focus has to be to dramatically increase support to those who are so desperately in need,” Mr. Grandi said, stressing the importance of a proper registration system that could help ensure everyone is eventually able to exercise the right to return.

In the country's capital, Dhaka, Mr. Grandi was scheduled to meet several senior officials, including the foreign minister as well as the ministers for home affairs and disaster management and relief.

Mr. Grandi thanked Bangladesh for keeping the border open. “In today's world, that is something that cannot be taken for granted and should be appreciated.”

Meanwhile, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said yesterday that a consignment of its emergency supplies for hundreds of thousands of refugee Rohingya children and their families has arrived in Dhaka.

The cargo plane arrived from Copenhagen with 100 tons of supplies comprising water purifying tablets, family hygiene kits, sanitary materials, plastic tarpaulins, recreational kits for children and other items.



“Safe water for drinking and washing is absolutely essential in order to protect them against diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases,” said Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF Representative in Bangladesh, warning that this is “a very real threat” especially amid the current heavy rains.

Other consignments – consisting of school bags, tents, early childhood development kits, family hygiene and dignity kits, tarpaulin and nutrition materials – were also on their way to Bangladesh.

New UN report details grave human rights violations in Crimea

25 September – The human rights situation in Crimea has significantly deteriorated under Russian occupation, a United Nations report says, detailing how residents there were affected when Ukrainian laws were substituted by those of Russia, including the imposition of Russian citizenship.

“Grave human rights violations, such as arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearances, ill-treatment and torture, and at least one extra-judicial execution were documented,” notes the report published today by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“The citizenship issue has had a major impact on the lives of many residents of Crimea,” High Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said in a press release.



UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein.
UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

“As the report states, imposing citizenship on the inhabitants of an occupied territory can be equated to compelling them to swear allegiance to a power they may consider as hostile, which is forbidden under the Fourth Geneva Convention,” the High Commissioner added.

The report reiterates that the imposition of Russian citizenship affected tens of thousands of people, particularly three groups: those who formally rejected citizenship; civil servants who had to renounce their Ukrainian citizenship or lose their jobs; and Crimean residents who did not meet the legal criteria for citizenship and became foreigners.

“Persons holding a residency permit and no Russian Federation citizenship do not enjoy equality before the law and are deprived of important rights,” the report says. “They cannot own agricultural land, vote and be elected, register a religious community, apply to hold a public meeting, hold positions in the public administration and re-register their private vehicle on the peninsula.”

The report makes 20 recommendations to the Russian Government, urging it to respect “its obligations as an occupying power,” uphold human rights for all, and effectively investigate alleged torture, abductions and killings involving members of the security forces and Crimean self-defence.

Ongoing settlement activities undermining Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts, warns UN envoy

25 September – Continuing settlement expansion, most notably in occupied East Jerusalem, is making the two-State solution increasingly unattainable and undermining Palestinian belief in the international peace efforts, a senior United Nations official told the Security Council today.

“In addition to illegal settlements, the practice of demolishing Palestinian structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and displacing Palestinians undermines the prospects of peace,” said Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

Briefing the 15-member body on the latest developments, Mr. Mladenov reported that since June, Israel’s illegal settlement activities have continued at a “high rate,” a consistent pattern over the course of this year. Activity during this period was concentrated primarily in occupied East Jerusalem, where plans were advanced for over 2,300 housing units in July, 30 per cent more than for the whole of 2016.

The reporting period witnessed the eviction of a Palestinian family in Sheikh Jarrah, residents for over 50 years, after a protracted legal battle. The building is located in a section of the neighbourhood in which several settlement plans were among those promoted in July.

“The United Nations considers all settlement activities to be illegal under international law and an impediment to peace,” the Special Coordinator stated.

He went on to note that violence persisted as one of the main obstacles to resolving the conflict. Although the reporting period was characterized by relatively low levels of fatalities, a number of incidents occurred, resulting in the deaths of 19 Palestinians and eight Israelis. Settler-related violence and punitive demolitions of Palestinians homes by the Israeli authorities also continued.

“Continued violence against civilians and incitement perpetuate mutual fear and suspicion, while impeding any efforts to bridge the gaps between the two sides,” said Mr. Mladenov.

“I once again urge both Palestinians and Israelis to demonstrate their commitment to rejecting violence, inflammatory rhetoric and provocative actions.”



Nickolay E. Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, briefs the Security Council from Jerusalem. UN Photo/Kim Haughton

Parties to Afghan conflict show renewed interest in political engagement, UN envoy says



UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, meeting with officials in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province. Photo: Fardin Waezi/UNAMA

25 September – Although efforts over the past few years to reach a political solution to the Afghan conflict have led to little progress, the top United Nations envoy in the country today reported a renewed interest in political engagements for peace.

“I am convinced that a political settlement is possible,” Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan, told the UN Security Council in his latest briefing, citing progress, still daunting challenges, and opportunities for political engagement.

“We should not let another fighting season begin without progress towards substantive negotiations. Opportunities will be lost, with the cost paid in thousands of Afghan lives and at tremendous financial cost.

“I appeal to the countries in the region to conduct a profound reassessment of their strategic interest and renew work towards a viable peace process leading to an Afghan-owned solution to the conflict. If requested, the United Nations stands ready to assist all parties to achieve this goal.”

Mr. Yamamoto said the United States announcement in August of a continuing, conditions-based commitment has removed some uncertainties, while regional countries and key States are actively seeking to promote regional engagements for peace, adding that preparations leading to a peace process are complex and efforts must be pragmatic and flexible.

“The security situation continues to be a major concern,” he stressed, citing the persistence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da’esh) in the east of the country, with new Da’esh activity reported in the north as well as in Kabul, the capital, making the situation more complex.

“The human cost of this violence is high, disproportionately impacting women and children,” he said, noting that current Afghan security planning foresees that by 2020 Afghan forces will reach sufficient strength to reverse recent Taliban gains, while the Taliban continue to resist appeals to negotiate with the Afghan Government.

At the current rate of deaths due to conflict, by 2020 tens of thousands more Afghans will have been killed.

Mr. Yamamoto, who also heads the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), reported some progress on key reforms, with the battle against corruption beginning to bear results after many years in which this debilitating issue was ignored.

There has also been progress on the organization of parliamentary and district council elections scheduled for next July. “It is imperative that we hold the elections according to the plan,” he stated, noting that timely elections will enhance the credibility of the political system.

New lab will boost UN efforts to keep harmful insects at bay



A bite from a parasite-carrying tsetse fly can cause trypanosomiasis in animals and sleeping sickness in humans. Photo: Geoffrey M. Attardo, Research Scientist, Yale School of Public Health

25 September – The United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) today opened the doors of a new laboratory to help countries use a nuclear technique to keep harmful insects, such as mosquitoes and fruit flies, at bay.

The modern Insect Pest Control Laboratory (IPCL), located in Seibersdorf, Austria, will boost the Agency’s ability to assist Member States in applying the Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) to combat insect pests that spread disease and damage crops.

“With new and modern facilities, the IPCL will in future be able to do even more to help Member States control insect pests that endanger our crops, our livestock and our health,” IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said during the inauguration ceremony.

The environmentally-safe SIT, a form of insect birth control, uses radiation to sterilize male insects, which are reared in large numbers and released in a target area to mate with wild females. Since they do not produce any offspring, the pest population is reduced over time, according to the Agency.

Along with additional space to train experts to support the transfer of SIT to countries, the new lab will facilitate research on the application of the technique for different insects, including mosquitos that transmit malaria, Zika and other diseases.

“The IPCL offers a very tangible example of the enormous practical benefits of nuclear science and technology,” noted Mr. Amano.

Earlier this year, the IAEA, in partnership with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), assisted the Dominican Republic in using SIT to eradicate an outbreak of the Mediterranean fruit fly – one of the most damaging agricultural pests in the world that attacks several types of fruits and vegetables.

Thanks to this assistance, the country was able to eradicate the fly within two years, and to regain access to export markets worth \$42 million a year.

Top UN envoy to Somalia welcomes parliamentary review of media law

25 September – The top United Nations envoy to Somalia today welcomed the recent introduction of legislation that would amend the 2016 media law, and urged lawmakers to give due consideration to the concerns raised by prominent members of Somalia’s news media about the existing law and the proposed amendments.

According to a press release from the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo’s cabinet approved a package of amendments to the media law in July that fulfilled a commitment he made to Somalia’s leading media associations within weeks of taking office.

The amendments drew criticism from those media associations and some international human rights groups for their limited scope and the introduction of new restrictions on existing press freedoms, the Mission noted.



Special Representative and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), Michael Keating being interviewed by local Somali TV about the UN’s role in Somalia. Photo: Michael Keating

“A free and independent news media is essential for accountability and democracy,” said the Special Representative of the

Secretary-General for Somalia and head of UNSOM, Michael Keating.

“Some provisions of the current media law do not appear to comply with international standards of media legislation and regulation. A careful and comprehensive review of the law and the proposed amendments will allow all key stakeholders to present their views.

“I hope the outcome of such a legislative process will promote a better environment for Somali journalists to practice their profession without fear.”

The proposed changes to the media law will be taken up by the Federal Parliament in the coming weeks.

UN chief voices concern over ‘potentially destabilizing effects’ of Kurdish referendum



Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Stéphane Dujarric. UN Photo/Evan Schneider (file)

25 September – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres voiced concern about the “potentially destabilizing effects” of today’s referendum in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

“The Secretary-General respects the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Iraq and considers that all outstanding issues between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government should be resolved through structured dialogue and constructive compromise,” his Spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric, said in a statement.

“The Secretary-General expects that United Nations-mandated activities across Iraq, including in the Kurdistan region, will be allowed to continue unhindered.”

Last week, both Mr. Guterres and the Security Council voiced their concern that the referendum was scheduled to be held amid ongoing operations to counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) – in which Kurdish forces have played a critical role.

The referendum could also detract from efforts to ensure the safe, voluntary return of over three million refugees and internally displaced persons, they noted.

Storm-ravaged Dominica in urgent need of food and water, finds UN assessment team



Destruction left behind in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria on the island of Dominica. Photo: Ben Parker/IRIN

25 September – A United Nations disaster assessment official visiting the small island nation of Dominica, which was battered by Hurricane Maria, said today that an estimated 60,000 to 65,000 people, or 80 per cent of the total population, have been affected and that food and water are the most immediate needs.

“There is a big, big urgency to get water and food,” said Sergio Da Silva, UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team leader, who spoke to reporters in New York by phone from the ground, adding that inaccessibility to remote areas has made it difficult to ascertain just how many people have been affected.

“And when you fly over, you see all the trees are down...debris everywhere and people are homeless,” he added.

Created in 1993, UNDAC is designed to help the UN and governments of disaster-affected countries during the first phase of a sudden-onset emergency.

Maria made landfall on the tiny island of 72,000 on the evening of 18 September, with maximum sustained winds of nearly 160 miles per hour.

Mr. Silva said he has been in Dominica since Thursday, assisting in the coordination of incoming international relief.

Along with food and shelter, getting clean water is a priority, he said, as water in the river is not consumable. Work is also under way to restore hospitals.

Delivering humanitarian aid to remote villages remains a huge challenge as many roads were destroyed.

UN Secretary-General condemns killing of peacekeepers in Mali



Senegalese UNPOL Officers patrol the streets of Gao, Mali. Photo MINUSMA/Marco Dormino

24 September – Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned today's attack against a convoy of the United Nations mission in northern Mali that killed three Bangladeshi peacekeepers.

Mr. Guterres reaffirmed the UN's determination to support efforts aimed at restoring lasting peace and security in Mali and urged the Government and the signatory armed groups to expedite the implementation of the peace agreement, according to a statement issued by his spokesperson.

Media reports said a convoy of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) hit an explosive device while traveling in the Gao region. At least, three Bangladeshi peacekeepers were killed and five others were seriously injured.

“The Secretary-General recalls that Security Council resolution 2374 of 5 September 2017 provides for the imposition of sanctions against entities or individuals obstructing the implementation of the peace agreement and attacking United Nations personnel,” the statement said.

The Secretary-General extended his condolences to the Government of Bangladesh and to the bereaved families, and wished swift recovery to the injured.