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Secretary-General welcomes launch of new UN mission in Haiti

16 October – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed the establishment Monday of the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), following the closure of its predecessor peacekeeping mission.

“MINUJUSTH reflects the commitment of the United Nations to continue supporting the consolidation of peace and promotion of stability in Haiti,” said a statement issued by Mr. Guterres’ Spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric.

The closure of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) is “a testament to Haiti’s progress over the past 13 years,” the statement said.

In the statement, the Secretary-General extended his gratitude to all civilian and uniformed personnel who served with MINUSTAH, as well as to troop and police contributing countries.

MINUJUSTH will assist the Haitian Government to strengthen rule of law institutions, further develop the capacities of the national police and advance human rights.



The UN flag is raised at the opening ceremony for the new United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH). Photo: Logan Abassi/MINUJUSTH

“The Secretary-General is confident that the Haitian people and Government will work in close partnership with MINUJUSTH and the United Nations country team, to implement together joint priorities based on [UN Security Council] resolution 2350 (2017) and reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” the statement said.

UN calls for global solidarity ahead of pledging conference on Rohingya refugee crisis



Many Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar arrive in Bangladesh under cover of darkness on wooden boats on the beach at Shah Porir Dwip, Teknaf, near Cox's Bazar. Photo: UNHCR/Roger Arnold

16 October – Senior United Nations officials are urging the international community to come together in support of a 23 October pledging conference to “send a strong message to Rohingya refugees and their generous hosts in Bangladesh that the world is there for them in their greatest time of need.”

Since late August, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya trying to escape discrimination and persecution in Myanmar’s Rakhine state have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh, sparking the world’s fastest-growing humanitarian emergency, according to the United Nations.

“We call on the international community to intensify efforts to bring a peaceful solution to the plight of the Rohingya, to end the desperate exodus, to support host communities and ensure the conditions that will allow for refugees’ eventual voluntary return in safety and dignity,” the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a joint statement Monday.

“The origins and, thus, the solutions to this crisis lie in Myanmar,” added the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, the UN aid chief, Mark Lowcock, the Director General, of IOM, William Lacy Swing.

They underscored that Bangladesh has kept its borders open, offering safety and shelter to fleeing families.

“We have been moved by the welcome and generosity shown by the local communities towards the refugees,” the senior officials stated, while noting their respective agencies have been working in overdrive with the Government of Bangladesh, local charities, volunteers and non-governmental organizations to provide assistance. Still much more is urgently needed.

The refugees are fully dependent on humanitarian assistance for food, water, health and other essential needs as basic services are under severe strain and some sites lack access to potable water and sanitation facilities, raising health risks for both the refugees and the hosting communities.

“The efforts must be scaled up and expanded to receive and protect refugees and ensure they are provided with basic shelter and acceptable living conditions. Every day more vulnerable people arrive with very little – if anything – and settle either in overcrowded existing camps or extremely congested makeshift sites,” the statement continued.

It announced that the ministerial-level pledging conference, set to be held in Geneva on 23 October, organized by OCHA, IOM and UNHCR and co-hosted by the European Union and Kuwait, will provide Governments an opportunity to show their solidarity and share the burden and responsibility.

“Their further generous support for the Joint Response Plan, which was recently launched by the UN and partners, is urgently needed to sustain and scale up the large humanitarian effort already under way. The plan requires \$434 million to meet the life-saving needs of all Rohingya refugees and their host communities – together an estimated 1.2 million people – for the difficult months to come,” added the statement.

UN General Assembly elects new members to the Human Rights Council



A delegate casts his country's ballot during the General Assembly's election of 15 members of the UN Human Rights Council for three-year terms beginning on 1 January 2018. Credit: UN Photo/Kim Haughton

16 October – The General Assembly today elected, by secret ballot, 15 States to serve on the Human Rights Council, the highest intergovernmental body in the United Nations system for matters relating to protection and promotion of human rights worldwide.

Newly elected to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council are Afghanistan, Angola, Australia, Chile, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Qatar, Senegal, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine.

All would serve three-year terms beginning on 1 January 2018.

The 15 new members were elected according to the following pattern: four seats for African States; four seats for Asia-Pacific States; three seats for Latin American and Caribbean States; two seats

for Eastern European States; and two seats for Western European and other States.

On the basis of equitable geographical distribution, Council seats are allocated to the five regional groups as follows: African States, 13 seats; Asia-Pacific States, 13 seats; Eastern European States, six seats; Latin American and Caribbean States, eight seats; and Western European and other States, seven seats.

Created by the General Assembly in 2006, the 47-member Council is responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them.

Its meetings are held at the UN Office at Geneva, located at Palais des Nations, which used to house the League of Nations, until its dissolution in 1946.

Kicking off 'Africa Week' at UN, Guterres says women and youth can unleash continent's potential

16 October – Africa must focus on young people, empower women and girls, and be innovative in leveraging resources and financing for development, Secretary-General António Guterres said Monday as the United Nations kicked off Africa Week.

“Africa Week is to raise awareness and mobilize support. I am convinced that, together, we can meet the challenges,” Mr. Guterres said in his remarks to the high-level inaugural event at UN Headquarters in New York.

The Secretary-General said the international community must change the way it looks at the African continent.

“Africa is a land of resilience, and above all, it is a land of opportunity,” he emphasized, highlighting the continent's recent progress in reducing poverty, diversifying its economies, building the middle class and nurturing growth in a variety of sectors.

To further unleash such potential, he said, young people must play a central role as Africa has the fastest growing youth



School children attend a parade in South Africa. Photo: Trevor Samson/World Bank

population in the world.

“We can help make the most of this demographic dividend through greater investments in education, especially in science and technology and by ensuring to enable youth participation in economic development. People need skills that match the needs of today and tomorrow,” he said.

Empowering Africa’s women and girls is also crucial, as gender inequality is costing sub-Saharan Africa tens of billions of dollars a year, like everywhere else in the world.

Another key is to be innovative in leveraging resources and financing for development, including tax reform by African countries themselves and international efforts to fight tax evasion, money laundering and the illicit financial flows that have depleted Africa’s resource base, he added.

Also addressing the inaugural event was UN General Assembly President Miroslav Lajcak, who said that in the past, Africa was expected to listen, and accept the ideas and conditions of others.

“That era is over [...] When it comes to its own development, Africa now has the most powerful voice of all. We need to listen to it, and learn from it,” he said.

Among other priorities, he stressed the importance of cooperation between the African Union (AU) and the UN, particularly in the area of sustainable development. The AU’s ‘Agenda 2063’ and the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development both outline a sustainable future for the planet and the people.

“They must be implemented in complementarity,” he said, noting that better and more regular engagement between the two entities is necessary at all stages, including planning, implementation, financing and review.

The events during Africa Week centre around the theme: ‘Supporting an Integrated, Prosperous, People-Centred and Peaceful Africa: Towards the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.’

At UN event in Rome, Pope Francis urges action on climate change, conflicts to end global hunger



Address by His Holiness Pope Francis, World Food Day Ceremony, FAO Headquarters (Plenary hall). Photo: FAO/Giuseppe Carotenuto.

16 October – Food security for all requires tackling climate change and ending conflicts, His Holiness, Pope Francis, stressed Monday at an official ceremony for World Food Day held at the Rome headquarters of the United Nations agriculture agency.

“It is clear that wars and climatic change are a cause of hunger, so let’s not present it as if hunger is an incurable disease,” the Pontiff said during his key note address marking the Day at headquarters of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Under this year’s theme ‘addressing migration through investing in food security and rural development,’ Pope Francis called for governments worldwide to collaborate to ensure voluntary and safer migration; for a disarmament commitment; and to protect the planet while using its resources – producing and consuming food.

Noting that it was unfortunate that some countries are moving away from the Paris Agreement on climate change, Pope Francis underscored “What is at stake is the credibility of the whole international system.”

Referring to the negotiation of a Global Pact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration – he asserted that managing

human mobility “requires coordinated, systematic intergovernmental action in line with existing international norms, and full of love and intelligence.”

This year, World Food Day is being marked as hunger is on the rise for the first time in over a decade, affecting 815 million people – 11 per cent of the global population. The increase is largely due to the proliferation of violent conflicts and climate-related shocks, which are also major drivers of distress migration.

“It is our intention to address the root causes of migration, such as poverty, food insecurity, inequality, unemployment and lack of social protection,” said FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva.

“We firmly believe that increasing investments in food security, sustainable rural development and in efforts to adapt agriculture to climate change, will help create the conditions whereby people, especially the youth, will no longer be forced to abandon their lands in order to seek a better life elsewhere,” he added.

Calling today’s biggest problem “man-made conflict,” World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Director David Beasley revealed that conflicts consume 80 per cent of the agency’s expenditure – over \$6 billion.

“We will never achieve Zero Hunger by 2030 until we end conflict,” he stressed.

“I call on the people in power, the people with guns, to stop the fighting now,” said Mr. Beasley, who has met many people fleeing conflict and violence in Yemen, South Sudan and Bangladesh over the past few months.

“I saw their wounds with my own eyes and I heard their stories with my own ears. They were frightened, hungry and malnourished after enduring a nightmare that most people cannot even imagine. If we are truly going to end hunger, we must stop this kind of inhumanity,” he said.

The future of migration

In his statement commemorating the day, William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), called climate action “paramount” in mitigating displacement saying: “Climate change is having far-reaching effects on agricultural productivity and food security. It is among the main reasons for the record numbers of people compelled to migrate from rural areas to towns and cities around the world.”

Under the premise that migration should be a choice, not a necessity, IOM is working towards this change with FAO, as 2018 co-chairs of the UN Global Migration Group – collaborating on projects to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations in rural areas to the impacts of natural hazards, climate change, food security and displacement.

“It is a cooperation that I think will continue to grow and strengthen as migration continues to be a megatrend in the world, which will become only greater with the worsening effects of climate change,” Mr. Swing said.



UN envoy discusses implementation of intra-Palestinian agreement with Prime Minister Hamdallah

16 October – Meeting the Palestinian Prime Minister today, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, and discussed the implementation of the intra-Palestinian agreement signed in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, on 12 October.

In particular, the agreement provides for the return of the crossings of Gaza to the Palestinian Authority by 1 November.

“The timely and effective implementation of this provision and concrete steps to alleviate the humanitarian crisis will be critical for effectively empowering the Palestinian Government in Gaza,” said Mr. Mladenov after his meeting with Prime Minister Hamdallah in Ramallah this afternoon, local time.

“The agreement is also an important step towards achieving the goal of Palestinian unity under a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian national authority,” added Mr. Mladenov.

The senior UN official also noted that the Organization will continue to work with the Palestinian leadership, Egypt and the region in support of the process, highlighting its importance for reaching a negotiated two-state solution and sustainable peace.

Following the agreement last week, UN Secretary-General António Guterres congratulated by phone, Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the State of Palestine, on the agreement and emphasized the need to urgently address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, particularly with regard to the electricity crisis, and improved access to and from the territory.

UN rights experts urge France to provide safe water, sanitation for migrants in ‘Calais Jungle’

16 October – United Nations human rights experts are urging the Government of France to devise long-term measures to provide access to safe drinking water and sanitation for migrants in Calais and other areas along the northern French coast.

After the so-called ‘Calais Jungle’ camps were dismantled in November 2016, migrants continued to return to the area. Many are living without shelter and proper access to drinking water, toilets or washing facilities.

“It is worrying that approximately 700 migrants in Calais and the greater area of Calais temporarily rely on only 10 portable lavatories and water from 10 taps,” said the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to water and sanitation, Léo Heller, in a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Despite the decision by the Conseil d’État, the highest administrative court in France, reaffirming the obligation of the French State to provide access to water and sanitation to the migrants in Calais, the local authorities have refused to implement concrete measures.



Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. (file) UN Photo/Loey Felipe



Several thousand asylum-seekers and migrants from Syria, Iraq, Ethiopia, Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan are living in makeshift camps or in the streets in Calais, France. Photo: UNHCR/C. Vander Eecken

“Human rights apply to all, including migrants, regardless of their status. Consequently, the legal recognition by the French court of the human rights obligation to provide access to water and sanitation should be commended, but the authority of those decisions is diminished if they are not implemented in practice,” said the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Felipe Gonzalez Morales.

Migrants in camps at Grande-Synthe, Tatinghem, Angres and Dieppe rely on help from volunteers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They are opening their facilities and provide transportation to sports facilities so that migrants can use toilets and take showers as a temporary solution.

The group of UN experts urged the international community to join calls emphasizing the primary obligation of the Government to provide a durable solution to the situation. Earlier this year, the Special Rapporteurs contacted the Government to seek clarification about the situation.

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.

Lift protest ban, protect judiciary and preserve civil society role, UN rights experts urge Kenya



Independent Expert on Human Rights Michel Forst. Photo: Jean-Marc Ferré

16 October – Voicing concern over restrictions on protests as well as attacks on judiciary and civil society in the run-up to presidential elections in Kenya, a group of United Nations independent human rights experts called on the Government to honour its obligations and protect the rights of Kenyans.

“It is precisely when political tensions are high that governments should do their utmost to let people express their grievances and to protect their rights,” said the experts in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“Kenya is facing a choice. We urge it to choose to uphold its constitution and pursue strengthening of its democracy, to avoid deepening political divisions and exacerbating tensions.”

According to the human rights experts, a pattern of police brutality, excessive use of force, consistent harassment of judges and threats to civil society has been witnessed even before the ban was imposed.

Under the restrictions, protests are forbidden in parts of the nation's three largest cities – Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu – until further notice, protests in other parts of the country require prior police permission and organizers can be held criminally liable for any offence by any participant.

In the news release, experts noted that while some previous protests had been marred by violent incidents, they stressed that response to any violence must be proportional to the level of threat and that security forces must prioritize dialogue and non-violent means.

The presidential elections are to be held on 26 October.

An 'alleged climate of impunity'

The rights experts also said that there was currently an alleged climate of impunity for law enforcement officers despite the launching of several investigations, including one into the violence that followed the 8 August general election, when dozens of people were killed and many injured as a result of police action.

In particular, they highlighted an incident on 28 September, when 27 students and staff at the University of Nairobi were reportedly injured when police used tear gas, beat them with wooden clubs, robbed them and threatened them with sexual violence.

A few days later, on 2 October, police reportedly used tear gas in a nursery in Nyalenda (a suburb of Kisumu) injuring at least three children.

“We call for a prompt, independent and thorough investigation into all allegations of police brutality,” the experts said, adding: “impunity fosters a culture of violence and mistrust, the opposite of what Kenya needs as it prepares for a repeat of the presidential elections.”

'Robust checks and balances are the prerogative of every democracy'

Further in the release, the experts expressed serious concern over reports of repeated attacks against individual judges and the judiciary in general and attempts to limit the courts' role in hearing election-related petitions.

“Robust checks and balances are the prerogative of every democracy,” they said, stressing that the independence of the judiciary must be protected.

They also underscored that the role of the civil society must also be preserved and denounced fake information being circulated online on social media, seeking to denigrate human rights organizations, including members of the Kura Yangu Sauti Yangu initiative which works for free and fair elections.

“This is unacceptable and must immediately stop,” the experts said. “Over the years, we have repeatedly raised concerns with the Government of Kenya about shrinking civil society space and attacks on individual human rights defenders.”

The UN human rights experts noted above include Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Agnes Callamard, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Diego García-Sayán, the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers; Nils Melzer, the Special Rapporteur on torture; and David Kaye, the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council – the highest intergovernmental forum in the UN system on rights issues – 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.



UN chief condemns Saturday's attacks in Mogadishu; commends responders



Violent extremists have carried out bombings in the Somali capital of Mogadishu on various occasions. Shown here is the aftermath of a car bomb attack on the city's Banadir Beach hotel on 25 August 2016.
Photo: UN Somalia (file)

15 October – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today commended the first responders and residents of the Somali capital, Mogadishu, for mobilizing to aid in what is being called Somalia's worst-ever bomb attack.

In a statement from his spokesperson, the Secretary-General urged all Somalis “to unite in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism and work together in building a functional and inclusive federal state.”

Strongly condemning the attacks, he conveyed his condolences to the bereaved families, as well as his wishes for a speedy recovery to those injured.

According to media reports, at least 200 people were killed and an even greater number of people were injured.

The Secretary-General's Special Representative in Somalia, Michael Keating today said that the UN and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) were working closely to support the response by the Federal Government of Somalia and local government authorities, including the provision of logistical support, medical supplies and expertise in the aftermath of the bombings.

“It is a revolting attack both in terms of its intent and impact,” the Special Representative said.

The Special Representative said that the immediate priority is to support efforts led by the authorities to recover from the attack and help all those affected, especially the injured and newly homeless.

“The international community will do everything possible to help the people and government of Somalia to overcome this tragedy,” he said.

According to media reports, a massive car bomb detonated outside the entrance to a hotel in the city's K5 junction, which is home to government offices, hotels and restaurants.

Later in the day, a second bombing was reported in the city's Madina district.

On International Day, UN highlights rural women's participation in sustainable, climate-resilient agricultural

15 October – Women and girls are central to the sustainability of rural households and communities, improving rural livelihoods and overall wellbeing, but their role and significance is often overlooked, the head of the United Nations entity for women's empowerment today said.

In her statement for International Day of Rural Women – marked annually on 15 October – Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-NGcuka noted that women farmers are “just as productive and enterprising” as male counterparts, but often lack equal access to land, credit, agricultural inputs, markets and high-value agrifood chains.

“Rural women are highly capable and knowledgeable custodians of their land, and can move further ahead to more fully and effectively participate in green value chains, including by profitably and sustainably linking rural and urban markets,” Ms. Mlambo-NGcuka said Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-NGcuka in her statement for the Day.

Globally, women comprise 43 per cent of the agricultural workforce, according to UN figures, with smallholder agriculture farmers producing nearly 80 per cent of food in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and support the livelihoods of some 2.5 billion people.

According to some estimates, closing the gender gap in access to land and other productive assets could increase agricultural outputs by up to 20 per cent in Africa.

Noting this year's theme for the Day, which focuses on opportunities and challenges in climate-resistant agriculture, the head of UN Women called for more training and skills development for rural women and girls so that they can play a greater role in the development of green food and agricultural value chains.

In addition, she highlighted the role that women farmers can play in protecting biodiversity through the use of indigenous crops and agro-ecological farming methods that are environmentally friendly and free of toxic chemicals.

All this relies on the Governments, however, “providing the social and physical infrastructure that enables rural women's participation in sustainable, climate-resilient agricultural production, processing, transport and marketing.”

But she stressed that life in a rural setting should not automatically lead to agriculture.

“Rural girls have an equal right to their urban peers to a good education, careers in STEM and a thriving role in the digital revolution,” Ms. Mlambo-NGcuka said referring to the acronym for vocations related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

She added that girls should also not automatically end up in unpaid positions caring for family members.

“Only once these inequalities are purposefully levelled, will both women and girls, whether rural or urban, be able to take their place at the heart of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the growth of a better future for us all,” the senior UN official said.

International Day of Rural Women is marked one day before World Food Day, which will focus this year on investing in food security and rural development in the context of migration, and on 17 October, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.



Small farms in Madagascar are hard hit by erratic weather and locust invasion. Photo: FAO/Yasuyoshi Chiba

Parliamentary forum opens in Russia; discussions to include UN cooperation

14 October – A committee to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) will discuss its work at the annual IPU forum, which began today in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Ahead of today's opening, IPU said that its 2,000 delegates will focus discussions this week on overcoming intolerance, xenophobia and extremism.

“As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, new technologies and migration are breaking down old barriers and bringing people together in different ways,” IPU said in the opening press conference in Russia, which featured Martin Chungong, the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.



Scene from St. Petersburg, Russian Federation.

During the Assembly, the parliamentarians are expected to sign a petition promoting democratic societies. They will also discuss a number of global issues, including prohibition of nuclear weapons, cyber-security, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promotion of renewable energy.

"We can no longer address global solutions without global reflection and consensus," Mr. Chungong said.

Among other issues, the IPU's Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs will discuss its work and look at ways “to bring a more robust parliamentary contribution to the major global processes,” according to IPU.

“I hope in the future all UN Member States will become IPU members, as well,” Valentina Matvienko, the Chairwoman of the Federation Council, said on the opening day, which included a forum for women parliamentarians.

The IPU is not a member of the United Nations, but following an agreement in July 2016, the two organizations agreed to strengthen collaboration on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

UN in Somalia condemns 'barbaric' bombings in Mogadishu



Michael Keating. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

14 October – The United Nations in Somalia strongly condemned today's blasts in the capital, Mogadishu, which reportedly killed or injured dozens of people.

In a tweet, the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) denounced the “barbaric bombings in Mogadishu targeting civilians.”

The head of UNSOM and UN Special Representative of Secretary-General in the country Michael Keating tweeted that he was “horrified” by the attacks.

He extended his “deepest condolences” to the families and friends of the dead and injured.

According to media reports, a massive car bomb detonated outside the entrance to a hotel in the city's K5 junction, which is home to government offices, hotels and restaurants.



Later in the day, a second bombing was reported in the city's Madina district.