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Migration should be act of hope, not despair; UN chief proposes ways to maximize migrants' contributions

Migrants wait in line to be registered in Berlin, Germany. Photo: UNICEF/Ashley Gilbertson VII

11 January – Laying out his vision for concrete steps the world can take in 2018 to maximize the contribution millions of migrants are already making to our societies and to agree a set of actions to ensure that the rights of all migrants are fully respected, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Thursday said the issue of migration calls for a truly global response.

“Let me emphasize: migration is a positive global phenomenon. It powers economic growth, reduces inequalities, connects diverse societies and helps us ride the demographic waves of population growth and decline,” said Mr. Guterres, launching Making Migration Work for All at UN Headquarters, in New York.

Globally, migrants make a major contribution to international development – both by their work as well as through remittances back to their home countries. Last year, migrants remitted nearly \$600 billion, three times all development aid.

“The majority of migrants live and work legally,” said the UN chief, noting however, that “others live in the shadows, unprotected by the law and unable to contribute fully to society.”

A “desperate minority” even put their very lives at risk to enter countries where they face suspicion and abuse, he noted, underlining that the impact can be seen not only in the humanitarian crises affecting people on the move and horrific violations of their fundamental rights, but also in public perception that wrongly sees migration as out of control leading to increased mistrust and policies that seek to stop rather than facilitate human movement.

Furthermore, authorities that erect obstacles to migration, actually end up, inflicting economic self-harm, as they impose barriers to having their labour needs met in an orderly, legal fashion.



“Worse still, they unintentionally encourage illegal migration,” said Mr. Guterres, noting that aspiring migrants, denied legal pathways to travel, inevitably fall into irregular methods that increase their vulnerability as well as undermine governments' authority.

The best way to end the stigma of illegality and abuse around migrants, he added, is for governments to put in place more legal pathways for migration as well as for development cooperation policies to take human mobility into account.

In the report, which also serves as his principal input to the 'zero draft' – a document forming the basis for final negotiations – of the proposed **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration**, Secretary-General Guterres calls for concerted effort to implement the declarations and commitments on migration its grounding in human rights.

The UN chief underscores: “The basic challenge before us is to maximize the benefits of migration rather than obsess about minimizing risks: we have a clear body of evidence revealing that, despite many real problems, migration is beneficial both for migrants and host communities in economic and social terms – our overarching task is to broaden the opportunities that migration offers to us all.”

At the same time, it also highlights the important role of all stakeholders – including municipalities, legislatures, civil society, the private sector, regional organizations, the media, academia and migrants themselves.

The report also notes the need for the UN system to be better placed and equipped to support the implementation of the Global Compact, in particular, its oversight.

“I stress my determination to strengthen how we work on this issue, consistent with my proposed management reforms and strengthening of the UN development system,” said Mr. Guterres.

Fair migration laws, fairly applied, benefit all – UN Envoy

Also speaking at the launch, Louise Arbour, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration highlighted the importance of treating migrants, including irregular migrants, with dignity and respect.

“Fair migration laws, fairly applied, benefit all: they increase predictable and orderly outcomes for States, safe and inclusive environments for both migrants and their host communities,” she said.

Ms. Arbour further stated that while much progress has been made in dealing with difficult issues around migration, however, the increased understanding has not always been reflected in world public opinion and recent reactions towards international migration have been a cause for concern.

Finding common grounds towards a global compact that will benefit States, migrants and communities alike will be important, she added.



In Damascus, UN aid chief outlines measures to improve response to Syrian crisis in 2018



In Homs, Syria, ten-year-old Khaled tells UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock about his love for school. He was displaced with his family a year ago from Palmyra. Photo: OCHA/Ghalia Seifo

11 January – After seven years of bloody conflict, the Syrian war has wreaked a “colossal toll” on the country and its people, the United Nations relief chief said on Thursday from the capital, Damascus, where he outlined ways to sustain and improve humanitarian assistance and protection for everyone affected by the crisis this year.

“I have this week seen first hand the colossal toll that the brutal and sustained hostilities have taken,” said Mark Lowcock, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, in a statement to the media on the third day of his visit to Syria.

Describing the dire situation, he said estimates suggest that hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, countless more are missing or detained, and five million have fled to other countries. Gross domestic product (GDP) is less than half what it was before the war, and replacing destroyed infrastructure and housing will cost hundreds

of billions of dollars.

“Almost 70 per cent of people now live in extreme poverty,” said Mr. Lowcock.

Against this background, he paid tribute to the thousands of aid workers that have worked to implement assistance programmes, explaining: “Most of them are Syrians and many are volunteers, working for the organizations of the UN, the Red Cross, [non-governmental organizations] and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.”

While in Syria, Mr. Lowcock, who is also the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said he has had open discussions with the Government about the crisis and what more needs to be done to reduce humanitarian suffering, and has also met local authorities, the diplomatic community and humanitarian organizations.

He said he is hoping soon to see “a number of positive developments” that enable the UN to sustain and improve the aid effort this year.

Such developments would include finalization of the UN’s humanitarian response plan for 2018, which seeks \$3.5 billion from donors to meet the needs of more than 13 million people in all parts of Syria, as well as agreement to medical evacuation for hundreds of critically ill people trapped in besieged Eastern Ghouta.

The UN’s humanitarian response plan for Syria, which targets some 13 million people and is one of the world’s largest sustained emergency aid efforts, totalled \$1.7 billion in 2017.

Also, agreement to three or four UN and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoys each week across front lines would provide assistance to up to 2.5 million people in besieged and hard to reach areas.

Further, the aid effort could be improved through agreement on UN-supported convoys from Damascus to Rukban in south-eastern Syria, and more effective arrangements to enable the UN to support the work of Syrian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and to enable international NGOs to play a stronger role in relieving the suffering.

Mr. Lowcock said he also discussed with the Government and others a number of other issues, including the review of the cross-border aid programmes from neighbouring countries into Syria which was commissioned last month by the Security Council.

“My mandate is to ensure humanitarian assistance and protection for everyone who needs it, in accordance with the long-



established principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality which have been endorsed by all the Member States of the UN,” he said.

In Hargeisa, UN envoy for Somalia calls for calm and dialogue following clashes



Michael Keating (left), UN Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia, and Somaliland’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Dr. Saad Ali Shire, speak to reporters at a press conference in Hargeisa, Somaliland. UN Photo/Tobin Jones

11 January – The top United Nations envoy for Somalia has called for calm and dialogue amid reports of clashes between security forces from ‘Somaliland’ and neighbouring Puntland.

“Our position is to try and reduce tensions [and] to increase dialogue very quickly between both sides, so that if there are misunderstandings, these are clarified,” said the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Somalia, Michael Keating, while in Hargeisa, the capital of ‘Somaliland.’

“If there are genuine differences, then they have to be subject to immediate discussion,” he added. “But resorting to military solutions and to violence is not the way to resolve these problems.”

The UN envoy was speaking at a joint press encounter yesterday with ‘Somaliland’s’ Foreign Minister, Saad Ali Shire, after having met with ‘Somaliland’s’ President Muse Bihi Abdi – their first meeting

since the latter was elected late last year.

Earlier this week, there were reports of clashes between security forces in the Sool region, part of a disputed area claimed by both ‘Somaliland’ and Puntland, located on the north-eastern tip of the Horn of Africa.

In their meeting, Mr. Keating and Mr. Bihi Abdi discussed the new government’s priorities, as well as the latest security issues.

“I was very impressed by and grateful to the President for his commitment, borne from his many decades of personal experience, of the importance of finding peaceful solutions to problems, “ he said, “and that a priority must be to try and prevent violence of any kind, whether in ‘Somaliland,’ or, indeed, between ‘Somaliland’ and others.”

While in Hargeisa, the UN envoy also met with several cabinet ministers to discuss various topics, including education, health, security, the impact of drought and employment, and how the United Nations can best provide support in addressing humanitarian and development challenges in these areas. Similar meetings were subsequently held with civil society representatives.

Part of the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) – which Mr. Keating also heads and which has an office in Hargeisa – is to support ‘Somaliland’ efforts towards a politically stable and democratic system that adheres to the principles of good governance.

Visit to Laas Geel highlights rich heritage and economic potential

The Special Representative also visited the Laas Geel rock shelters, located an hour north-east of Hargeisa, and the location of Neolithic paintings dating back several thousands of years.

“One of the reasons I wanted to come here is because it’s good to be reminded that [while] the image of this part of the world is about conflict and so much despair and suffering, and yet it’s also one of the cradles of civilization,” Mr. Keating said.

“So while it’s a resource for the world, it’s also very important for Somalis to know that they are living in a land with great history and traditions and that is changing and is dynamic,” he added.

French researchers came across the site during an archaeological survey of the area in 2002, and it is considered to be one of the oldest rock art sites in Africa and the most important ancient site in ‘Somaliland.’ The paintings depict wild animals, decorated cattle and herders.

According to local authorities, up to 200 hundred visitors, from the region and abroad, make the trek to the site each month, despite access difficulties and concerns over security.

“That would suggest that the potential is indeed enormous, and not just limited to rock caves, “ said Mr. Keating. “There’s the natural environment, the coast and the beaches are incredible, the potential for tourism is enormous.”

There have been concerns over recent years that the site’s paintings are under threat of serious deterioration from their exposure to the elements as well as local animals.

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sent a team to review the site in 2016. It has made recommendations on how to best safeguard it, and is working with local authorities on putting those measures in place.

UN agencies call for funds to reverse food ration cuts for refugees in Rwanda

11 January – United Nations humanitarian agencies on Thursday called for more donor funding to reverse a 25 per cent reduction in food or cash assistance for more than 100,000 refugees in Rwanda.

“We thank donors for their continued generosity and support, while urging them to further fund humanitarian assistance so that we can give refugees the assistance they depend on,” said Jean-Pierre de Margerie, Rwanda Country Director of the World Food Programme (WFP).

Some 130,000 Burundian and Congolese refugees in Rwandan camps rely on humanitarian assistance.

Full rations of nutrition support for refugees provide 2,100 calories per person per day, the minimum for a healthy life. However, funding shortages forced WFP to trim assistance to 90 per cent in November and December, and since January, WFP has reduced the ration sizes to 75 per cent.

Some \$11 million are needed to restore full support for the next six months.

For its part, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had secured only 19 per cent of its total funding needs as of December 2017.

UNHCR, WFP and others have started moving towards targeting to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable are considered, while continuing supplementary feeding and promoting self-reliance by supporting a Government pledge to 'graduate' 18,000 camp-based refugees from food and/or cash for food assistance programmes by mid-2018.

“Now more than ever is the time to find innovative and long-term solutions for refugees in Rwanda,” said UNHCR Representative Ahmed Baba Fall.



Burundian refugees arriving from a transition camp in Nyanza are processed at Mahama camp in Rwanda's Eastern Province. (file)
Photo: UNHCR/Anthony Karumba

A Government-UN joint strategy on economic inclusion of refugees enables more refugees to become self-reliant and contribute to the economic development of their host communities by creating access to formal employment opportunities for up to 60,000 refugees and providing banking services for a similar number of refugees by mid-2018.

Boko Haram attacks, human trafficking threaten progress in West Africa and Sahel – UN envoy

11 January – The security situation in West Africa and the Sahel remains of grave concern, the United Nations envoy for the region said Thursday, warning that while there had been progress on the political front over the past year, there had also been a worrying upsurge in Boko Haram attacks.

“Following a notable decline in Boko Haram attacks in the first half of the year, there has been an uptick in the number of incidents since September last year, with a peak of 143 civilian casualties alone in November 2017,” said Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative and Head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

In his report, he noted a fivefold increase in the use of children as suicide bombers by Boko Haram, reaching some 135 cases in 2017.

Updating the Council on Mali, he said that terrorists launched a complex attack on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission’s (MINUSMA) positions in Kidal, which resulted in one peacekeeper’s death, while three Malian soldiers were killed by a landmine and another by terrorists in Niono. Additionally, two separate attacks on security posts were registered in Burkina Faso near the Malian border.

“The attacks in Mali as well as within the Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso tri-border area are mainly attributed to A1-Qaida affiliated groups and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara,” he stated.

Turning to Niger, he noted that because of an increasing number of security incidents, the government has dedicated 17 per cent of 2018 public expenditure to the security sector – compared to 15 per cent last year.

“This has, however, triggered demonstrations in Niger’s capital given the expected detrimental effects on the delivery of social services,” he asserted.

The UN envoy pointed out that while 700 Boko Haram abductees have recently escaped, the group continues to kidnap people and that, overall, more than two million displaced persons “desperately” await an end to the Lake Chad Basin crisis.

Commending the efforts of the Multinational Joint Task Force operating in the region, he stressed that the comprehensive response of the region to address the Boko Haram threat “must be supported by the international community.”

He explained that in the Sahel, the Group of Five (G5) – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – had made significant progress in operationalizing its Joint Force, including by establishing its military command structure and Force headquarters in Sevarey and conducting its first military operation with French troops in late October.

Additionally, in line with Security Council resolution 2391 (2017), consultations among the UN, European Union (EU) and G5 are ongoing regarding the conclusion of a technical agreement on supporting the Joint Force through MINUSMA.

“The past six months have seen substantive progress in the efforts to reinvigorate UNISS,” he said, noting that a support plan would be shared with national, regional and international partners to harmonize approaches and canvass for effective support to the Sahel “in line with national and regional priorities, the UN Agenda 2030 and the AU Agenda 2063.”



Mohammed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel, briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Meanwhile, he noted that migration has become one of the most lucrative activities for criminal networks across West Africa and the Sahel.

“Stemming human trafficking must continue to be a top priority in 2018 as recently underscored by Secretary-General Guterres,” he affirmed.