



In the headlines:

- Middle East: As fighting worsens, UN chief heads to region to help broker solution
- Downing of Malaysian jet highlights urgency of resolving Ukraine crisis – UN official
- UN reports serious human rights violations, potential war crimes in Iraq
- UN, European officials concerned at deliberate attacks on civilians in Central African Republic
- Honouring Nelson Mandela's legacy, UN pledges acts of kindness and goodwill
- Libya: UN mission condemns assassination of former parliament member
- General Assembly re-elects Joan Clos as head of UN Human Settlements Programme
- UN rights office urges probe into clashes between security forces, protesters in Cambodia

Middle East: As fighting worsens, UN chief heads to region to help broker solution

18 July - Amid an escalation of violence in Gaza, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will leave for the region on Saturday to express solidarity with Israelis and Palestinians, and to help bolster regional and international efforts for a solution.

Briefing the Security Council on the latest developments, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman said the Secretary-General is "prepared to do his part" to help the parties end the violence and find a way forward.

While Israel has legitimate security concerns, the United Nations "is alarmed by Israel's heavy response," said Mr. Feltman.

While it was "indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza into Israel" that ended yesterday's five-hour humanitarian pause, he said, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) has so far conducted four ground incursions into Gaza and some 90 airstrikes, firing 91 missiles, as well as more than 500 shells.

Palestinians, meanwhile, have fired some 127 rockets and 29 mortar shells at Israel, during the same period.

Since 8 July, when hostilities intensified, two Israelis were killed, including one civilian, and at least 365 civilians were injured. Meanwhile, some 250 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians, have been killed, and more than 1,900 civilians were injured in strikes from land, air and sea.

"The Secretary-General is extremely concerned that this escalation will further increase the already appalling death toll among Gazan civilians," Mr. Feltman said.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson last night, the Secretary-General called for an immediate end to the "indiscriminate firing of rockets by Hamas into Israel and Israeli retaliatory action."

He asked the parties to do their utmost to protect civilians and UN premises and staff, and to ensure that humanitarian



A Palestinian girl stands on the ruins of her home after it was destroyed in an airstrike in a refugee camp in the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip (12 July 2014). © UNICEF/NYHQ2014-0911/EI Baba

assistance continues to reach all those in need.

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said today that over 47,000 displaced Gazans have taken refuge in its facilities. The overall number of displaced people inside Gaza is likely to be far higher as many people will have taken sanctuary with family and friends.

“We again appeal to the warring parties to respect international humanitarian law obligations towards civilians, humanitarian workers and UN installations. They must exercise maximum restraint at this time of great violence and instability,” said UNRWA spokesperson Chris Gunness.

Mr. Feltman added that the Secretary-General has been “in touch around the clock with world leaders” to facilitate collective action to stop the violence, and was alarmed when fighting resumed after yesterday’s humanitarian pause. The temporary pause in fighting had raised hopes for a long-term ceasefire to be brokered by the Government of Egypt.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas met yesterday with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Cairo, and both reportedly agreed to the necessity of an immediate ceasefire and the urgency of holding a donors conference to start rebuilding the Gaza Strip, Mr. Feltman said.

Mr. Ban is currently reviewing a request by Mr. Abbas which would place Palestine under an international protection system administered by the UN.

In his briefing, Mr. Feltman reiterated the importance of addressing the root causes of the currently escalation, with support to durable political, security, institutional and socioeconomic progress that stabilizes Gaza. This includes an end to weapons smuggling, the full opening of the crossings and bringing Gaza back under one legitimate Palestinian Government adhering to Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) commitments, and the paying of salaries to tens of thousands of employees working in Gaza after 2007 without payment.

He also stressed the importance of refocusing efforts towards a two-State solution, as the only viable route to end the decades-long conflict in the Middle East.

The impact of the situation in Gaza is also being felt in Lebanon, where the UN Interim Force (UNIFIL), in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, has intensified patrols in the area as a result of rockets being launched into Israel. The IDF retaliated in all five of the instances.

The destabilizing of the Golan Heights is also a grave danger, Mr. Feltman said, with exchanges of fire reported between the Syrian Armed Forces and armed members of the opposition.

Furthermore, the fighting poses a danger to the wider West Bank, where supporters of both sides have clashed.

“Our appeal stands on the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to defuse tensions and act responsibly,” stressed Mr. Feltman.

Downing of Malaysian jet highlights urgency of resolving Ukraine crisis – UN official



The UN Security Council holds a moment of silence in honour of the victims of crashed flight MH17. UN Photo/Loey Felipe

18 July - The apparent deliberate downing of a Malaysian passenger plane over eastern Ukraine highlights the need for an urgent resumption of a ceasefire and a serious effort to end the ongoing crisis, the United Nations political chief told an emergency meeting of the Security Council today.

Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, carrying 298 people, was en route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur when it crashed on Thursday in eastern Ukraine, near the Russian border.

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman said that while the UN has at this point no independent verification of the circumstances regarding the tragic crash, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is alarmed at what seem to be “credible, numerous

reports” that suggest that a sophisticated surface-to-air missile was used.

“The Secretary-General strongly condemns this apparently deliberate downing of a civilian aircraft,” said Mr. Feltman. “This horrifying incident serves as the starkest reminder of how dire the situation in eastern Ukraine has become – and how it affects countries and families well beyond Ukraine’s borders.”

A separate statement issued by Mr. Ban’s spokesperson said that “this horrifying incident must at the very least prompt a serious and sustained effort to end the fighting in Ukraine.” It also stressed the need for accountability for the tragedy.

Both the Secretary-General and the Security Council have called for an international investigation into the incident. The Council, in a press statement, also stressed the need for all parties to grant immediate access by investigators to the crash site.

Mr. Feltman said the UN is fully ready to cooperate, and it has been in touch with the UN International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which has offered to Ukrainian officials its investigative capacity in order to put together an international team.

Among the casualties of the crash was a staff member of the World Health Organization (WHO), Glenn Thomas, who was on his way to an international AIDS conference in Australia. The Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) said in a statement that a number of other passengers on the flight were also on their way to participate in the conference.

“The UNAIDS family is in deep shock. Our hearts go out to the families of all the victims of this tragic crash,” said Executive Director Michel Sidibé. “The deaths of so many committed people working against HIV will be a great loss for the AIDS response.”

On the Ukraine crisis, Mr. Feltman reported that following the 30 June announcement by President Petro Poroshenko of the end of the 10-day ceasefire and subsequent resumption of the security and law enforcement operation in the east, the fighting between Government forces and armed groups has intensified dangerously, resulting in numerous deaths.

According to the Ukrainian authorities, a number of towns, including notably the cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, as well as various smaller villages in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, have been returned to their control.

However, Mr. Feltman said, relentless fighting has continued particularly in and around the cities of Lugansk and Donetsk, where the armed groups appear to have consolidated their presence. Earlier this week, a fierce battle was also fought over the international airport in Lugansk that now appears under the Ukrainian Government’s control.

The situation on and around the border between Ukraine and Russia is of “particular concern,” he said, noting that, while it is impossible for the UN to independently verify these accounts, a number of fatal incidents as well as intense fighting have been reported in recent days.

“As the Secretary-General has reiterated on countless occasions, armed groups need to immediately disarm and stop engaging in unlawful and violent acts,” the official stated.

“At the same time, we continue to strongly urge the Ukrainian authorities to act with maximum restraint and to make every effort possible to ensure the protection of civilians caught in the fighting.”

While estimations of the total number of civilian casualties vary, the UN human rights office reports there have been approximately 500 casualties so far and 1,400 people injured. Also, the UN refugee agency estimates that the crisis has displaced some tens of thousands of people.

“Grievances can and must never justify endangering the lives of those one claims and aims to represent and protect,” Mr. Feltman stated. “As the fighting continues, we are, however, disconcerted by the apparent lack of tangible progress toward a political solution.

“A first, critical step would be the immediate resumption of a ceasefire,” he stated.

“Establishing a path to peace in Ukraine, as in areas of conflict elsewhere in the world, requires a concerted effort by national actors from across the political spectrum, backed by strong and unified support of the international community,” said Mr. Feltman, who is expected to return to Kiev and Moscow in the coming days in the spirit of the Secretary-General’s good offices.

UN reports serious human rights violations, potential war crimes in Iraq

18 July - The group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and its allies are imposing “untold hardship and suffering” on Iraqi civilians, the United Nations said today in a report that also casts doubt as to whether Iraqi security forces (ISF) and associated forces have done enough to protect civilians during hostilities.

The report, compiled by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the UN human rights office (OHCHR), is based on direct monitoring activities as well as a variety of sources, including civilian victims and witnesses, of events between 5 June and 5 July.



Khazir camp for Internally Displaced Persons, Iraq. Photo: UNAMI

It documents ISIL and allies carrying out “large-scale killings, injuries and destruction and damage of livelihoods and property,” according to OHCHR, including in “markets, restaurants, shops, cafes, playgrounds, schools, places of worship and other public spaces where civilians gather in large numbers.”

“ISIL and associated armed groups have carried out many of these attacks in a systematic manner heedless of the impact on civilians, or have systematically targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure with the intention of killing and wounding as many civilians as possible,” the report states.

At least 1,531 civilians were killed in Iraq last month and 1,763 were wounded, according to UN figures. Some 1.2 million Iraqis have been internally displaced as a result of the violence – including over 600,000 since the beginning of June alone.

The report also documents violations committed by ISF and associated forces, including summary executions and extrajudicial killings of prisoners and detainees, “which may also amount to war crimes.”

Report authors also raised concerns about whether ISF and affiliated forces adhered to the principle of distinction and proportionality.

“International law requires that both the Iraqi State and armed groups take all measures to minimize the impact of violence on civilians,” said Nickolay Mladenov, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Iraq and head of UNAMI.

He stressed that, in addition, State and armed groups must “respect the principles of distinction and proportionality when carrying out military operations,” as well as “take steps to ensure the safety and protection of civilians by enabling them to leave areas affected by violence in safety and dignity, and to access basic humanitarian assistance at all times.”

The report also notes that children have been disproportionately affected by the conflict.

“In all conflict-affected areas, child casualties due to indiscriminate or systematic attacks by armed groups and by Government shelling on populated areas have been on the rise,” it states. “Credible information on recruitment and use of children as soldiers was also received.”

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said she was particularly concerned about the protection and welfare of members of vulnerable groups who remain in areas affected by the armed conflict, especially women, female-headed households, children, people with disabilities, the elderly, and members of minority groups.

“Every day we receive accounts of a terrible litany of human rights violations being committed in Iraq against ordinary Iraqi children, women and men, who have been deprived of their security, their livelihoods, their homes, education, healthcare and other basic services,” she said.

“The deliberate or indiscriminate targeting of civilians, the killing of civilians, the use of civilians as shields, the hindering of access for civilians to humanitarian assistance may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity,” she added.

The Government of Iraq is obligated to investigate serious violations, she stressed, and to hold the perpetrators to account.

Senior UN officials, including Mr. Ban, have reiterated the importance of a solution based on inclusive political and social processes that will address the concerns of all communities.

Mr. Mladenov noted that now that a Speaker of Parliament has been elected, “it is vital that Iraqi leaders quickly move forward on the nomination of a new President and a new Government.”

Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, warned today that Iraq risks “full-fledged sectarian war and complete fragmentation” as Iraqis continue to flee their homes and minority groups are targeted.

Iraqi politicians and the international community are “running out of time to act,” said the UN refugee chief, who arrived in the country earlier this week and witnessed the dire conditions facing some those uprooted by the violence.

UN, European officials concerned at deliberate attacks on civilians in Central African Republic



Central African Republic children in Chad. Photo: Anna Jeffreys/IRIN

18 July - The United Nations and European Commission emergency relief coordinators expressed deep concern today over reports of alarming levels of violence in the Central African Republic (CAR), including several cases in which armed groups deliberately targeted camps sheltering displaced people.

“These attacks are intolerable violations of international law and the perpetrators must be held accountable,” UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos and European Union Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response Kristalina Georgieva urged in a joint statement.

“We call on all parties to the conflict, and on those who may have influence over them, to end attacks on civilians, schools, hospitals, religious sites and humanitarian aid workers,” they said.

According to the statement, armed groups attacked a religious site hosting 10,000 displaced people in Bambari on 7 July, killing at least 26 people and injuring 35. This followed weeks of escalating violence in and around Bambari. Hospitals in

the area were overwhelmed with people who need treatment for gunshot and machete wounds.

Some 2.5 million Central Africans need assistance. More than half a million people, mainly women and children, have fled their homes and are living in temporary shelters, sometimes deep in the forest or in sites where they are at risk of attack. Waves of hungry, sick and exhausted refugees and returnees are arriving in neighbouring countries, putting a strain on host communities and creating a regional crisis.

“Central Africans are surviving without the most vital necessities including food, medicines and clean water, and many are living in fear for their lives. We must stand with them and show them they are not alone,” the joint statement said.

Ms. Amos and Ms. Georgieva called on the EU and UN Member States to step up their efforts, both on the security side and by finding new funding streams for humanitarian operations inside CAR and in neighbouring countries.

While international forces led by the African Union and EU are playing an indispensable role in protecting civilians, insecurity persists and hinders the deployment of humanitarian aid workers.

Honouring Nelson Mandela’s legacy, UN pledges acts of kindness and goodwill



18 July - On Nelson Mandela International Day, the United Nations pledged today to promote “desperately needed” acts of kindness and goodwill and uplift poor and underdeveloped communities worldwide.

“For the past five years, we have come together to celebrate the life and spirit of a unique individual who touched the entire world – Nelson Mandela – the Madiba,” General Assembly President John Ashe said during a special event at UN Headquarters.

In 2009, the Assembly declared 18 July “Nelson Mandela International Day” in recognition of the former South African President’s contribution to the culture of peace and freedom. Today’s is the first observance since Mr. Mandela’s passing last December.

“This year, for the first time, we celebrate his birthday without him. But while our hearts hang heavy with loss, we have his indelible memory and his important legacy to carry forward,” said Mr. Ashe.

Every year on Mandela Day, people around the world are encouraged to devote 67 minutes to helping others – by volunteering in a hospital, tutoring a child, providing food for the homeless, or any other community service.

“We may not be able to change the sorrows or the tragedies of the world singlehandedly, but indeed, it is in our hands to make a difference with our individual 67 minutes,” Mr. Ashe said.

The campaign – “Take Action, Inspire Change” – is based on people devoting one minute of their time for every year that Nelson Mandela devoted to public service – as a human rights lawyer, a prisoner of conscience, an international peacemaker and president of South Africa.

“We cannot give in to despair and despondency, because each inspired action of service, kindness or generosity will bring us closer to the realization that if we give our all we can strive for a better tomorrow,” said the Assembly President.

Hence, it is critical to involve “each and every one of us” in the process to craft a global development agenda, he added. A future plan must create a vision of justice, prosperity and opportunity for all the peoples of the world, while honouring the planet.

“In this first year without Madiba, each and every one of us gathered here knows that he will be remembered and revered for many generations to come. His impact on the world was so profound and meaningful, that his name will be spoken by our

children and our children's children.”

Also speaking at the event, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that “Nelson Mandela sacrificed his freedom for human rights. He was also a champion of sustainable development.”

Mr. Ban remembered Mr. Mandela's personal connection to the earth as a gardener. Even in jail, he gained the right to plant a garden on the roof of the prison.

The Secretary-General quoted Mr. Mandela: “To plant a seed, watch it grow, to tend it and then harvest it, offered a simple but enduring satisfaction. The sense of being the custodian of this small patch of earth offered a small taste of freedom.”

In tribute to that, Mr. Ban will join volunteers from MillionTreesNYC and UN staff to tend to dozens of newly planted trees near UN Headquarters and in the community of East Harlem.

He said that New York City's trees remove an impressive 2,200 tons of pollutants from the air each year. The city is also aiming to increase its urban forest by 20 per cent. These valuable initiatives show that everyone can be part of the climate solution.

On a global scale, Mr. Ban said creative ideas were advancing progress and called for a major global push for action. In September, he will convene a climate summit at the UN with Heads of State and Government, along with leaders from business and finance, local government and civil society. Honouring Mr. Mandela's legacy included addressing climate change, promoting sustainable development and helping all people to enjoy lives of dignity, he noted.

Mr. Mandela wrote a letter to the UN in 2010, when the General Assembly declared this Day, asking the Organization to honour him by honouring millions of people who contributed to the struggle for freedom everywhere.

“The best way to commemorate these struggles is for people everywhere to work with and within communities to make this a better world,” Mr. Mandela wrote.

UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, in her message, said the Day is an opportunity for everyone to bring the best out of themselves by taking some form of action in solidarity with others, to be of service, and to inspire change in the world.

She recalled watching him stand up for women's participation, and noted that under his presidency, women's representation in South Africa's parliament increased from 2.7 per cent to 27 per cent. In addition, when it came time to choose his cabinet, Mr. Mandela made sure that one-third were women.

"The call to action on Mandela Day is for each of us to go out and do something. For men and boys to support gender equality, for those with wealth to support those of lesser means, for collective action on climate justice. For those of us who have had an opportunity to learn, it is a call to teach and share our knowledge."

Also participating in today's event were Reverend Jesse Jackson, former New York City Mayor David Dinkins, and Nelson Mandela's grandson, Kweku Mandela.

Libya: UN mission condemns assassination of former parliament member



A resident of Tayuri stands against a bullet-riddled wall of his house, part of which was destroyed during clashes in Libya. Photo: IRIN/Zahra Moloo

18 July - The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) today strongly condemned the assassination of former member of the General National Congress Fariha Barkawi.

Ms. Barkawi was shot by gunmen yesterday in Derna, in eastern Libya, where the violence has escalated in recent days. She is the second prominent woman to be assassinated in Libya in less than a month.

On 25 June 2014, prominent rights and political activist Salwa Bugaighis was shot dead in her Benghazi residence after casting her vote in the country's parliamentary elections.

"UNSMIL is particularly disturbed by the deliberate targeting by assassination of women activists," it said in a statement issued in Tripoli.

The Mission deplored the escalating violence in Benghazi and Tripoli, which it said was causing casualties among civilians and driving families out of their homes. It called on all sides for a cessation of hostilities.

"The United Nations reiterates its call upon all sides to refrain from all kinds of violence and demands that measures be taken to ensure the protection of all civilians during this current armed conflict."

The recent turmoil has reportedly been some of the worst fighting since the 2011 uprising that ousted former leader Muammar al-Qadhafi and the North African nation embarked on its democratic transition.

General Assembly re-elects Joan Clos as head of UN Human Settlements Programme

18 July - The General Assembly has re-elected Joan Clos of Spain as the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to a second term, which will run from 18 October 2014 until 31 December 2017.

The Assembly took this action yesterday on the recommendation of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and following consultations with Member States.

Mr. Clos, a medical doctor with a distinguished career in public service and diplomacy, has previously served as Mayor of Barcelona – serving two terms from 1997 until 2006. Prior to that, he served as the Minister of Industry, Tourism, and Trade of Spain between 2006 and 2008 and as the Spanish Ambassador to Turkey and Azerbaijan from 2008 to 2010.



UN-HABITAT Executive Director Joan Clos. Photo: UN-HABITAT/CamaraLucida

Mr. Clos has earned a reputation in urban renewal projects, as well as international empowerment of local authorities.

Based in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, UN-Habitat seeks to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all.

UN rights office urges probe into clashes between security forces, protesters in Cambodia



OHCHR spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani. Photo: UN Multimedia

18 July - The United Nations today said it is deeply concerned about the clashes that erupted earlier this week in the Cambodian capital between security forces and opposition supporters, during which dozens of people were injured, and urged an investigation into the violence.

Members of the main opposition party had gathered in Freedom Park in Phnom Penh on 15 July to protest against the barricading of the only designated area for public demonstrations in the capital, according to information from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

“We are particularly alarmed at the ongoing arrests of leaders of the Cambodia National Rescue Party following the violence,” OHCHR spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani told reporters in Geneva.

“We are concerned about the very serious charges which were brought against them, including ‘insurrection’, given the widely observed efforts by opposition leaders to calm the protesters and stop the violence during the clashes. Any politically motivated charges must be dropped immediately.”

OHCHR called on the judicial authorities to strictly abide by human rights standards in the pursuit of these cases, recalling the seriously flawed processes surrounding other recent cases.

“We also urge the Cambodian authorities to launch a prompt, effective, impartial and transparent investigation and to ensure those responsible for these violent incidents are held accountable,” said Ms. Shamdasani.

The Office called on all sides to exercise maximum restraint and to resume negotiations to end the political deadlock, and stressed that all restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly must be lifted immediately.