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Global unemployment projected to rise over the next two years, UN labour agency warns

19 January - Despite falling unemployment in some developed economies, the global jobs crisis is likely to continue for at least the next two years, especially in emerging economies, topping 200 million by 2017, the United Nations labour agency warned today, calling for urgent steps to boost jobs.

“The significant slowdown in emerging economies coupled with a sharp decline in commodity prices is having a dramatic effect on the world of work,” UN International Labour Organization (ILO) Director-General Guy Ryder said of the latest report.

“Many working women and men are having to accept low paid jobs, both in emerging and developing economies and also, increasingly in developed countries,” he added, stressing that despite a drop in unemployment in some European Union countries and the United States, too many people are still jobless.

“We need to take urgent action to boost the number of decent work opportunities or we risk intensified social tensions,” said the ILO chief.

Final unemployment for 2015 is estimated to stand at 197.1 million, 27 million higher than the pre-crisis level of 2007, and in 2016 it is forecast to rise by about 2.3 million to 199.4 million, according to the ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2016. An additional 1.1 million jobless will likely be added to the global tally in 2017.



Workers in a Ready-made Garments factory in Bangladesh. Photo: ILO Bangladesh

The unemployment rate for developed economies decreased from 7.1 per cent in 2014 to 6.7 per cent in 2015, but in most cases these improvements were not enough to eliminate the jobs gap that emerged due to the global financial crisis.

Moreover, the employment outlook has now weakened in emerging and developing economies, notably in Brazil, China and oil-producing countries.

“The unstable economic environment associated with volatile capital flows, still dysfunctional financial markets and the shortage of global demand continue to affect enterprises and deter investment and job creation,” said Raymond Torres, Director of the ILO Research Department.

“In addition, policy-makers need to focus more on strengthening employment policies and tackling excessive inequalities. There is much evidence that well-designed labour market and social policies are essential for boosting economic growth and addressing the jobs crisis and almost eight years after the start of the global crisis, a strengthening of that policy approach is urgently needed,” he said.

Job quality remains a major challenge. While there has been a decrease in poverty rates, the decline in working poor in developing economies has slowed and vulnerable employment still accounts for over 46 per cent of the total, affecting nearly 1.5 billion people.

Vulnerable employment is particularly high in emerging and developing economies, hitting between half and three-quarters of the employed population, with peaks in Southern Asia at 74 per cent and sub-Saharan Africa at 70 per cent.

The report also shows that informal employment, as a percentage of non-agricultural employment, exceeds 50 per cent in half of the developing and emerging countries with comparable data. In one-third of these countries, it affects over 65 per cent of workers.

“The lack of decent jobs leads people to turn to informal employment, which is typically characterized by low productivity, low pay and no social protection. This needs to change,” Mr. Ryder said. Stressing that responding urgently to the global jobs challenge is key to achieving the UN’s newly-adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Fate of civilians in armed conflict ‘grim’ with thousands killed, hospitals under attack, Security Council told

19 January - With scores of civilians being killed in conflicts worldwide, tens of thousands facing starvation in besieged cities, and hospitals under attack, the United Nations Security Council held a day-long session today amid calls for greater accountability and expanded use of the International Criminal Court.

“The reality on the ground is grim and bleak,” UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson told the Council at the start of the session on the ‘Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.’ “In conflicts around the world, great numbers of civilians are deliberately or recklessly killed, maimed, tortured and abducted. Sexual violence is rampant,” he said.

“Hospitals must be sanctuaries in wartime. But recently we have seen a surge in attacks on hospitals and health centres. In Afghanistan, an airstrike destroyed a surgical ward with devastation everywhere. In Yemen, hospitals have been attacked and children, who have not been killed by bullets and bombs, are dying from the lack of medicine and health-care,” he stressed.

He noted that in 2014, 92 per cent of those killed or injured by explosive weapons in populated areas were civilians, with 19,000 civilians killed in Iraq between January 2014 and October 2015 and the “horrible reality” in the Syrian town of Madaya, where thousands of people have been denied food and medical treatment for months, leading to starvation and death.

“This carnage of innocent people must not continue,” he declared. “Let us remember that Madaya is just one place where



A group of children at the UNMISS Protection of Civilians (POC) camp in Bentiu, Unity State, South Sudan. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

this, shamefully, is happening – and this, today, in the 21st century,” Mr. Eliasson underscored.

“A siege that denies people access to the basic necessities of life is one of the gravest violations of international law and an affront to our shared humanity,” he continued, noting that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has recently condemned such violations, naming them war crimes. “These crimes simply must stop, end now,” he added.

Mr. Eliasson cited the new challenges presented by non-State extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Boko Haram in West Africa. “These groups brazenly and brutally murder thousands of people, kidnap young girls, systematically deny women’s rights, destroy cultural institutions and undermine the peaceful values of religions,” he said.

In the face of such ubiquitous violations of human rights he called for enhanced efforts to prevent conflicts in the first place, and where this failed to ensure full accountability through the accession of all States to the International Criminal Court which was set up to judge war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as by domestic adoption of robust criminal legislation.

Also briefing the Council, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Vice-President Christine Beerli warned that violations of international humanitarian law are occurring daily. “Explosive weapons are used indiscriminately in populated areas. Civilian populations and civilian objects are deliberately targeted,” she said.

“Civilian communities are forcibly displaced and trapped in lengthy sieges, deprived of means of survival. Women and men, girls and boys are regularly the victims of rape and sexual violence. Schools are attacked or used for military purposes, leading to their loss of protection against attack. Detainees are summarily executed, tortured and kept in inhumane conditions and denied due process of law,” she explained.

Harsh winter poses additional hazards to child refugees and migrants arriving in Europe – UN



A young girl stands outside a tent at the Vinojug reception centre for refugees and migrants in Gevgelija, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Photo: UNICEF/Ashley Gilbertson VII

19 January - With children now accounting for more than one in three of the tens of thousands of refugees and migrants flooding into Europe, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today voiced concern at the impact recent sub-zero temperatures and snowy conditions were having on them.

The children arriving into a harsh winter in south-eastern Europe are physically exhausted, scared, distressed and often in need of medical assistance, UNICEF spokesman Christophe Boulhierac told the regular bi-weekly news briefing in Geneva.

The conditions are exacerbating the poor physical condition of the children, as many lack access to adequate clothing and age-appropriate nutrition, a situation worsened by lack of shelter and inadequate heating in some reception centres, as well as on buses and trains, he

said.

The proportion of children amongst refugees and migrants has continued to increase over the past three months. According to national sources, in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the ratio in December was 37 per cent, compared to 23 per cent in September. In Serbia, the figures were 36 per cent in December compared to 27 per cent in September.

In December most children transiting through UNICEF spaces in Serbia were babies, infants and those between five and nine years old. In 2015, more than one million refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean, arriving on Europe’s shores, of which an estimated 253,700 were children, one in four people.

In a press release, UNICEF’s Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe, Marie-Pierre Poirier said that children are particularly susceptible to respiratory infections, digestive problems and diarrhoea. Non-controlled use of baby formula may also seriously affect babies’ health.

UNICEF warned that there remains insufficient cross-border information-sharing and follow-up on the most vulnerable children, mainly due to the speed of the population movement.

Ms. Poirier said UNICEF was engaging with its partners and counterparts to develop contingency plans for population movement slow-downs and an increasing number of people being stranded along the route.

In the past three months, UNICEF and its partners have provided 81,000 children with services in UNICEF-supported winterized child-friendly spaces in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia. In addition, nearly 18,000 babies and infants had received specialized services through UNICEF mother-and-baby care spaces.

Overnight aid deliveries reach four Syrian towns while situation in east 'extremely grave' – UN

19 January - Overnight aid deliveries reached the Syrian towns of Madaya, Zabadani, Kefraya and Foah, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which today announced it is planning on delivering more assistance.

“It was slightly delayed due to several issues – one of them was the weather– it’s getting increasingly cold and difficult to move around in Syria so there are many, many obstacles to this, but the operation continues based on the so-called ‘Four Town Agreement’ which we do have,” OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke told reporters in Geneva.

Regarding delays to the convoys destined for Foah and Kafraya, Mr. Laerke said they were due to reports from armed opposition groups who said they needed more time to finalize arrangements in areas under their control.

“That piece of information and the delay meant that also the convoy going into Madaya and Zabadani had to be delayed,” he explained. “These convoys have to proceed at the same time. If there is a delay in one convoy, the other one will have to wait. It is a very, very finely calibrated operation.”

Fuel in particular was delivered to the locations during this third joint operation with UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) in recent weeks, but a diverse range of aid is reportedly still needed, including food, nutrition and health services.

Asked how many civilians in Madaya had starved to death, Mr. Laerke said it was believed five people had died from starvation since 11 January when the first aid convoy arrived. He noted this is not a UN figure, but rather one recorded by health staff in the town.

He described the situation in the eastern part of Syria as “extremely grave” and “catastrophic.”

“If you are talking about Deir al-Zour for example, where we have the city under-siege by the Islamic State group, ISIL, we are extremely concerned about the plight of some 200,000 people in the western part of the town,” the spokesperson warned. “We do not have unhindered access to the place.”

Meanwhile in related news, UN human rights expert Hilal Elver today warned that some 400,000 people living in 15 besieged locations throughout Syria are trapped in desperate circumstances and in urgent need of emergency assistance. “An immediate and unconditional humanitarian pause in hostilities must be put in place to allow humanitarian aid and food to reach everyone in Syria,” Ms. Elver said.

“As the brutal conflict in Syria continues, the plight of those already living in constant fear of deadly and indiscriminate bombardment is now compounded by the threat of starvation, with parties on all sides of the conflict continuing to entirely or heavily restrict access to essential supplies,” the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food noted.



In Madaya, Syria, local community members help offload and distribute humanitarian aid supplies. Photo: WFP/Hussam Al Saleh

Turning to political development, reporters were informed that the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, is “intensively occupied” with preparations for the Intra Syrian Talks, in order for them to start next week.

Yesterday, Mr. de Mistura briefed the UN Security Council by video link from Geneva, and was in touch with both Security Council members and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The Special Envoy was reportedly also in contact with members of the International Syrian Support Group in an effort to find agreement on the list of participants for the meeting.

In Jordan, UN refugee agency chief urges greater efforts to end Syria conflict



UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi meets with a family at Za'atari Refugee Camp, Jordan. Photo: UNHCR/Christopher Herwig

19 January - The international community must make greater efforts to end the conflict in Syria or risk prolonging the world's biggest humanitarian crisis for many years to come, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has said during a trip to the region.

“It is essential that the international community and all actors that have an influence on the parties to the conflict – and the parties to the conflict themselves, first and foremost – exercise greater efforts towards peace,” Filippo Grandi told reporters while visiting Jordan’s Za’atari refugee camp.

Three weeks after taking up office, Mr. Grandi said he had chosen to travel to the region on his first overseas trip to focus minds on finding solutions to the nearly five-year-old

conflict.

“If a settlement of the conflict is not found, this crisis will not end and we will continue year after year to ask the international community for huge amounts of money to support refugees that – until there is peace – will not want to go back,” he stated.

Mr. Grandi urged governments to take advantage of two upcoming global conferences in London in February and Geneva in March to pledge more financial support for refugees and host countries, and increase the number of legal resettlement places for those escaping the conflict.

According to the High Commissioner’s Office (UNHCR), the protracted nature of the crisis is having a devastating effect on millions of ordinary Syrians, as well as placing a huge burden on neighbouring countries that have so far taken in more than four million refugees.

Jordan is currently host to more than 630,000 Syrian refugees, putting a huge strain on the small kingdom’s natural resources, infrastructure and economy. While almost 110,000 Syrians currently live in Za’atari and the country’s other main camp at Azraq, the vast majority are struggling to survive in towns and cities across Jordan.

Addressing the plight of an estimated 17,000 Syrians currently camped near the country’s north-eastern border, Mr. Grandi said he fully appreciated Jordan’s security concerns and pledged UNHCR’s help in screening individuals in order to allow those in need of international protection to enter the kingdom.

While at the camp, he met a Syrian Bedouin family who arrived in Za’atari in February 2013. A father of six, Mohammad Olayan said he had witnessed a steady improvement in conditions during his three years there.

“When we first came we were living in a tent and there were no services. Now we have two caravans, and there is electricity and proper sanitation,” he said.

Despite the improvements, the family still struggles to feed themselves with the food assistance they receive, and Mohammad must borrow money or try to find work to keep food on the table.

While his three young sons attend school in the camp, his two school-aged daughters say they are still too traumatized by the conflict and intimidated by the large class sizes to go. As a result, Mohammed and his wife and daughters spend much of

their time inside their shelter.

“What else can refugees do?” he asked.

After three years in exile with no end in sight, Mohammad said he is considering returning to the family's small farm in Syria's southern Dara'a province despite the danger.

“We don't want to run away for the rest of our lives,” he explained. “Maybe it would be better to die quickly in Syria than the slow death we face here.”

The High Commissioner's visit also includes stops in Turkey and Lebanon.

'Staggering' civilian death toll in Iraq – UN report

19 January - A United Nations report released today details the severe and extensive impact on civilians of the ongoing conflict in Iraq, with at least 18,802 civilians killed and another 36,245 wounded between January 2014 and October 2015, while another 3.2 million people have been internally displaced due to violence.

Of the total number of casualties, at least 3,855 civilians were killed and 7,056 wounded between 1 May and 31 October last year – the period covered by the report. According to the UN, the actual figures could be much higher than those documented, and about half of these deaths took place in Baghdad.

“The violence suffered by civilians in Iraq remains staggering,” the report states. “The so-called ‘Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant’ (ISIL) continues to commit systematic and widespread violence and abuses of international human rights law and humanitarian law. These acts may, in some instances, amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possibly genocide.”

The report, compiled by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), is based largely on testimony obtained directly from the victims, survivors or witnesses of violations of international human rights or international humanitarian law, including interviews with internally displaced people.

“During the reporting period, ISIL killed and abducted scores of civilians, often in a targeted manner,” the report notes. “Victims include those perceived to be opposed to ISIL ideology and rule; persons affiliated with the Government, such as former Iraqi security forces (ISF), police officers, former public officials and electoral workers; professionals, such as doctors and lawyers; journalists; and tribal and religious leaders.”

The report adds that “others have been abducted or killed on the pretext of aiding or providing information to Government security forces. Many have been subjected to adjudication by ISIL self-appointed courts which, in addition to ordering the murder of countless people, have imposed grim punishments such as stoning and amputations.”

In addition, it details numerous examples of killings by ISIL in gruesome public spectacles, including by shooting, beheading, bulldozing, burning alive and throwing people off the top of buildings. There are also reports of the murder of child soldiers who fled fighting on the frontlines in Anbar. Information received and verified suggests that between 800 and 900 children in Mosul had been abducted by ISIL for religious education and military training.

“ISIL continued to subject women and children to sexual violence, particularly in the form of sexual slavery,” the report states.

It also documents alleged violations and abuses of international human rights and international humanitarian law by the Iraqi Security Forces and associated forces, including militia and tribal forces, popular mobilization units, and Peshmerga.

The UN indicated that concerning reports have also been received of unlawful killings and abductions perpetrated by some



An increasing number of people, including families with children and the elderly, have encountered deadly ambushes as they try to escape areas controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Photo: UNAMI

elements associated with pro-Government forces.

“Some of these incidents may have been reprisals against persons perceived to support or be associated with ISIL,” the report explains. “Moreover, as civilians move around the country, fleeing violence, they have continued to face Government restrictions on their ability to access safe areas. Once they reach such areas, some have experienced arbitrary arrest in raids by security forces and others have been forcibly expelled. The conduct of pro-Government forces’ operations raises concern that they are carried out without taking all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population and civilian objects.”

Furthermore, the discovery of a number of mass graves is documented in the report, including in areas regained by the Government from ISIL control, as well as mass graves from the time of Saddam Hussein. One of them uncovered reportedly contains 377 corpses, including women and children apparently killed during the 1991 Shi’a uprisings against Saddam Hussein in the east of Basra.

In a press release, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, said “despite their steady losses to pro government forces, the scourge of ISIL continues to kill, maim and displace Iraqi civilians in the thousands and to cause untold suffering.”

Mr. Kubiš strongly reiterated his call to all parties to the conflict to ensure the protection of civilians from the effects of violence, while also calling on the international community to enhance its support to the Government of Iraq’s humanitarian, stabilization and reconstruction efforts in areas liberated from ISIL, “so that all Iraqis displaced by violence can return to their homes in safety and in dignity and that affected communities can be re-established in their places of origin.”

“I urge the government to use all means to ensure law and order, necessary for the voluntary return of [internally displaced persons] to their place of origin – a task of primary importance given the recent wave of violence and killings, often of sectarian nature, notably in Diyala and Baghdad,” the top UN official added.

Meanwhile, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein warned that the civilian death toll may be considerably higher, and called for urgent action to rein in the impunity enjoyed by the vast majority of the perpetrators of violence.

“Even the obscene casualty figures fail to accurately reflect exactly how terribly civilians are suffering in Iraq,” he underlined. “The figures capture those who were killed or maimed by overt violence, but countless others have died from the lack of access to basic food, water or medical care,” the High Commissioner said.

“This report lays bare the enduring suffering of civilians in Iraq and starkly illustrates what Iraqi refugees are attempting to escape when they flee to Europe and other regions. This is the horror they face in their homelands,” he added.

Mr. Zeid also appealed to the Government to undertake legislative amendments to grant Iraqi courts jurisdiction over international crimes and to become party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

UN chief names ‘eminent advocates’ to propel achievement of new Sustainable Development Goals



Source: UN in collaboration with Project Everyone

19 January - A queen, a crown princess, a president, a prime minister, a Chinese e-commerce pioneer, and a player often ranked as the world’s best footballer are among eminent Advocates appointed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today to help achieve the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which seeks to eliminate poverty, hunger and a raft of social ills, all within 15 years.

The eminent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Advocates “will build on their unique standing and leadership to promote the SDGs as part of an ambitious and transformative global development agenda,” a UN spokesperson said.

“They are to support the Secretary-General in his efforts to generate momentum and commitment to achieve the SDGs by

2030,” the spokesperson added in a note to correspondents, which also listed the panellists.

The co-chairs are Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama and Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg. Members include Queen Mathilde of Belgium; Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden; Jack Ma, Founder and Executive Chairman of the Chinese Alibaba Group of Internet-based businesses; and Leo Messi, the world renowned Argentine-born footballer, who is already a UN Children’s Fund Goodwill Ambassador.

The 2030 Agenda, adopted unanimously by 193 Heads of State and other top leaders at a summit at UN Headquarters in New York in September, calls on all countries to achieve 17 SDGs, addressing the needs of people in both developed and developing countries.

They build on the earlier eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which specifically sought by 2015: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development.

But progress on these was uneven across regions and countries, leaving millions of people behind, especially the poorest and those disadvantaged due to sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographic location. This is where the SDGs come in.

They stress everything from zero poverty, zero hunger, good health, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, and affordable clean energy, to decent work and economic growth, innovation, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities, responsible consumption, climate action, unpolluted oceans and land, and partnerships to achieve the goals.

“The SDG Advocates will promote the universal character of the SDGs, including their commitment to leave no one behind; to promote the engagement of new stakeholders in the implementation and financing of the SDGs; to encourage partnerships with governments, civil society and the private sector to share knowledge and resources; and to raise awareness for the integrated nature of the SDGs,” the spokesperson said.

The other Advocates are: Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Co-Founder of the Qatar Foundation; screenwriter, producer and film director Richard Curtis; Dho Young-Shim, Chairperson of the UN World Tourism Organization’s Sustainable Tourism Foundation; Leymah Gbowee, Director of the Gbowee Peace; Graça Machel, President of the Foundation for Community Development; Alaa Murabit; Founder of The Voice of Libyan Women; Paul Polman, Chief Executive Officer of Unilever; Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Colombia University; Shakira Mebarak, Founder of the Pies Descalzos Foundation; actor Forest Whitaker, Founder of the Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative; and Noble Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus, Founder of the Grameen Bank.

Long-term funding crucial to monitoring nuclear agreement with Iran, UN atomic chief warns

19 January - The head of the United Nations nuclear agency today called for long-term predictable funding to monitor Iran’s agreement with the international community to never seek, develop or acquire nuclear weapons.

“I am grateful to countries that have already made, or pledged, contributions and I count on the support of all Member States in ensuring predictable funding for this long-term verification and monitoring work,” UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Yukiya Amano told his Board of Governors at IAEA headquarters in Vienna.

Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached in July between and Iran and a group of six countries – China, France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom and United States – the IAEA is entrusted with verifying and monitoring Iran’s commitments.

On Saturday, Mr. Amano announced that Iran had carried out all the preliminary requirements for the lifting of sanctions



IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano delivers his introductory statement to the 1427th Board of Governors Meeting, Vienna, Austria, 19 January 2016. Photo: IAEA/Dean Calma

that the UN had imposed since it was revealed in 2003 that Iran had pursued various nuclear activities for 18 years in violation of its commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Iran said its activities were purely peaceful for energy production and medical purposes but several countries suspected it was seeking to produce nuclear weapons.

“The way is now clear for the Agency to begin verifying and monitoring Iran’s nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA, as requested by the Security Council and authorized by the Board,” Mr. Amano said today.

“As I informed the Board in December, implementation of the Additional Protocol, and verification and monitoring of Iran’s nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA, involve activities for which predictable funding is needed,” he added, referring to an addition to the NPT which enhances IAEA's ability to monitor nuclear activities to verify that they are peaceful.

“Implementation of the JCPOA marks the beginning of a new phase in relations between Iran and the IAEA. We have come a long way since the Agency first started considering the Iran nuclear issue in 2003. A lot of work has gone into getting us here. Equal effort will be required in the future to implement the JCPOA. The IAEA is fully committed to playing its part,” he said.

UN refugee agency warns over perilous Horn of Africa sea crossings



Migrants form queues to be counted by their smuggler prior to being transported by boat from Obock, northern Djibouti, to Yemen. Photo: Kristy Siegfried/IRIN

19 January - Despite the ongoing conflict in Yemen, thousands of Ethiopians and Somalis are continuing to make a perilous sea crossing, which has already claimed at least three dozen lives this year, the UN refugee agency warned today.

Latest data on sea arrivals shows that 92,446 people arrived in Yemen by boat in 2015, one of the highest annual totals recorded over the past decade. A full two thirds arrived since March 2015 when the conflict began.

With 95 deaths reported, 2015 is the second deadliest year recorded to date. In view of this, and the loss of 36 lives in an incident on 8 January this year, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today reiterated its warning to people contemplating the crossing over the dangers of this journey.

“The overall figures are disturbing,” UNHCR spokesperson Adrian Edwards told reporters at a news briefing in Geneva.

“People continue to arrive despite unprecedented escalated internal conflict in Yemen and tragically, more people continue to lose their lives trying to cross the sea in overcrowded, unseaworthy boats,” he added.

UNHCR began systematic recording of arrivals in Yemen in 2006. To date, only 2011 and 2012 have seen higher arrivals of Ethiopians and Somalis in Yemen than there were in 2015. Almost 90 per cent of last year's arrivals were from Ethiopia.

UNHCR in Somalia and its partners have reportedly been working with the international community and Somali authorities to improve political, security and socio-economic conditions in Somalia. They have also been actively pursuing durable solutions for refugees, returnees and people who are internally displaced.

According to the agency, these efforts aim at providing an alternative to Somalis to undertaking perilous sea journeys to Yemen. The number of Somalis who made the journey to Yemen last year compares to a high of just over 33,000 in 2008.

Meanwhile, many new arrivals are reportedly misinformed about the severity of the conflict, believe that the situation has become relatively calm in some of the southern governorates, or are following rumours of improved access into neighbouring Gulf countries.

New arrivals have been described as facing movement restrictions in Yemen, and there have been reports of some being caught in the conflict and killed. There are now fewer income opportunities and available services, and organized gangs and smugglers continue to operate along the Red Sea coast.

“UNHCR and partners in the Horn of Africa counsel would-be crossers about the inherent dangers of the journey, the realities of the situation on the ground in Yemen and the asylum and assistance options available to them,” Mr. Edwards said.

Conflict continues to rage in the country and Yemenis are bearing the brunt with the UN estimating that over 2.5 million people are now internally displaced. Despite severely restricted humanitarian access and security constraints, UNHCR reached over 280,000 internally displaced Yemenis with essential household items and shelter material in 2015.

Yemen is also host to over 266,000 refugees, of which some 250,000 are Somali. Meanwhile, over 168,000 people have fled Yemen to neighbouring countries since March.

UN experts urge France to protect fundamental freedoms while combatting terrorism

19 January - A group of United Nations human rights experts warned today that the current state of emergency in France and the country’s law on surveillance of electronic communications impose excessive and disproportionate restrictions on fundamental freedoms.

“As France debates the strengthening of measures in the fight against terrorism, and considers a reform of the criminal procedure, we call on the authorities to revise the provisions and possible reforms adopted to that end, to ensure they comply with international human rights law,” the UN experts said in a press statement.

In a list of concerns to the French Government, the independent experts stressed a lack of clarity and precision on provisions regarding several state of emergency and surveillance laws that relate to the legitimate rights of privacy and freedoms – of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

To guarantee the rule of law and prevent arbitrary procedures, the experts recommended the adoption of prior judicial controls over anti-terrorism measures. Since the recent terrorist attacks in France, the state of emergency law in force, which temporarily expands the executive powers in the fight against terrorism, only allows judicial review a posteriori.

The UN experts also noted that the November 2015 law on surveillance of international electronic communications expands the executive power over the collection, analysis and storage of communications content or metadata – without requiring prior authorization or judicial review.

“Ensuring adequate protection against abuse in the use of exceptional measures and surveillance measures in the context of the fight against terrorism is an international obligation of the French State,” they stated.

The UN experts also expressed alarm that environmental activists in France have been under house arrest in connection with the state of emergency invoked following the November attacks. “These measures do not seem to adjust to the fundamental principles of necessity and proportionality,” they said, highlighting the risks faced by fundamental freedoms in the fight against terrorism.

Calling on France not to extend the state of emergency beyond 26 February 2016, they said, that: “While exceptional measures may be required under exceptional circumstances, this does not relieve the authorities from demonstrating that these are applied solely for the purposes for which they were prescribed, and are directly related to the specific objective that inspired them.”

The independent experts – David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression; Maina Kiai, Special



UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon pays tribute to the victims of the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November. 6 December 2015. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Ben Emmerson, Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; and Joseph Cannataci, Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy – expressed their solidarity and deepest sympathy to the victims of the terrorist attacks committed in France and many other places in the world.

Special Rapporteurs, who are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organization, are appointed by and report to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council.

UN rights experts welcome Iran prisoner releases, call for freeing of all unlawfully-held detainees

19 January - United Nations human rights experts today welcomed Iran's weekend release of four Iranian-Americans in an apparent prisoner swap with the United States, and called on Tehran to pave the way for the freeing of all remaining unlawfully detained prisoners.

Regarding freed *Washington Post* reporter Jason Rezaian, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, said in a press release that: "For the past year and a half, Mr. Rezaian's unlawful detention had come to symbolize the Iranian Government's widening crackdown on speech and press freedoms in the country."

While welcoming his release, the UN expert underscored that Mr. Rezaian should not have been in prison in the first place since his prosecution was connected to his work as a journalist and freedom of expression.

"The Government of Iran should protect those who exercise their freedom of expression, instead of prosecuting them," Mr. Kaye stressed. "Dozens of Iranian journalists, bloggers and social media activists remain behind bars in Iran simply for exercising their legitimate rights of expressing views," he added.

Two other freed prisoners, Christian pastor Saeed Abedini – who was arrested in 2012 reportedly for activities related to home churches – and Amir Hekmati, were being prosecuted for espionage and other national security-related crimes in trials that fell short of international standards.

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, reminded Iran of its responsibility to ensure that no one is prosecuted or detained because of their religious views or activities, including Christians of Muslim backgrounds.

"While Iranian officials allowed pastor Abedini to board the plane and put this horrible ordeal behind him, they continue to hold dozens of Iranian Christians on vague and overly broad national security charges like 'propaganda against the system.' These detentions clearly violate not only Iran's obligations under international law but their own constitution," Mr. Bielefeldt noted.

Ahmed Shaheed, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, praised the lifting of Iranian sanctions, which coincided with the prisoners' release, and made a special appeal to the Iranian authorities "to spare no effort in addressing long-standing human rights concerns repeatedly raised by the UN human rights mechanisms, especially the alarming surge in executions this past year, increasing restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful assemblies, women's rights, discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities, and the ongoing prosecution of journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders."

Mr. Shaheed also renewed his call on Iran to engage constructively with his Human Rights Council mandate by allowing a visit to the country.

Special Rapporteurs, who are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organization, are appointed by and report to the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council.



Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression David Kaye. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

Niger: UN and partners struggling to assist thousands newly displaced by Boko Haram violence



A makeshift refugee shelter beside the highway east of Diffa, Niger. Photo: UNHCR/Boubacar Bamba

19 January - Citing a “very serious situation with acute shortages of shelter” in south-east Niger where some 100,000 people have fled to escape Boko Haram violence, the United Nations refugee agency today appealed for urgent humanitarian assistance and funding to help those that have been uprooted.

“Our team in Niger describes the situation as very serious with acute shortages of shelter and non-food items for the displaced,” Adrian Edwards, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told journalists in Geneva today.

These newly displaced include local villagers, internally displaced people (IDPs), people who have been displaced several times, and Nigerian refugees, according to a recent

UNHCR team visit.

“UNHCR is redirecting available resources to meet the urgent shelter and other assistance,” Mr. Edwards said, calling on donors for extra support to help this vulnerable population.

The agency’s current Niger operation is about half funded with \$24.9 million received against overall requirements of \$51 million.

While struggling to cope with the humanitarian needs, UNHCR and partners have conducted a more comprehensive registration to simplify needs identification, delivered food in south-east Niger’s Diffa region, and offered health care and sanitation.

However, many newly displaced, who have sought shelter alongside Niger’s National Route No. 1, are without protection by the Niger army. Moreover, they do not have adequate access to water sanitation, shelter and school.

“Providing assistance and shelter is all the more difficult because people are living in spontaneous sites rather than in a camp environment,” warned Mr. Edwards.

The conflict in north-east Nigeria has forced more than 220,300 people to find refuge in neighbouring countries such as Niger, Cameroon, and Chad since 2013. In Niger, insurgent incursions had displaced an estimated 50,000 people within the country, according to UNHCR.

UN envoy congratulates Libyans and Presidency Council on formation of unity government

19 January - The most senior United Nations official in Libya today strongly welcomed the formation of the Government of National Accord by the Presidency Council as a significant step forward in the quest to end the political divisions and the armed conflict.

"This is a sterling opportunity for Libyans to come together to build their country," Martin Kobler, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) said in a statement.

“The formation of the Government of National Accord (GNA) is one important leap on the path to peace and stability in Libya, I congratulate the Libyan people. Hard work lies ahead,” he added.

The Special Representative also stressed the need to immediately move forward to the next step which is the endorsement of



Special Representative and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Martin Kobler. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

the GNA by the House Representatives.

"I call on the members of the [House] and its presidency to uphold the country's national interest above all other considerations and promptly convene to discuss and endorse the proposed cabinet," Mr. Kobler said.

UNSMIL was established in 2011 by the UN Security Council at the request of the Libyan authorities following six months of armed conflict to support the country's new transitional authorities in their post-conflict efforts.