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As powerful new quake hits Nepal, UN races to deliver aid to those affected



Photo: UNICEF/NYHQ2015-1113/Anthony

12 May - A new earthquake measuring 7.3 in magnitude has struck Nepal today killing at least 40 people, according to information received by the United Nations, just two weeks after a powerful tremor killed more than 8,000 thousand people and devastated much of the country's infrastructure.

The epicentre of the quake was 76 kilometres northeast of Kathmandu – an area already impacted by the 25 April quake, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a flash update.

The initial quake was followed by several aftershocks including a 5.6 magnitude tremor with the epicentre in Kodari and a 6.3 magnitude one with the epicentre in Ramechhap District.

In a phone call with *UN Radio*, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Emergency Communications Specialist in Kathmandu Rose Foley described today's temblor.

"We had a major aftershock. It really seemed like another earthquake because it was pretty violent, not as violent [as the first], but it went on for a very long time. I work with UNICEF so I was in the office along with my colleagues," she said.

"We're all geared to provide relief and then there was this major jolt and you thought okay, 'maybe it will go away,' but it didn't. It just got stronger. Four or five of us just ducked under the nearest table we could find and held on to each other waiting for it to go away but it just went on rocking and rocking and rocking for a long time," Ms. Foley said.



According to OCHA, landslides were reported in Langtang Region in the Himalayas. Many areas around the epicentre are particularly susceptible to landslides. Five people were reported rescued in Charikot. Reports of people buried under rubble are also coming in from across the country, including from Tatopani.

Some buildings damaged by the 25 April quake collapsed today and new damage to housing and infrastructure is also being reported across the districts. The existing camps in Chautara remain open and are accommodating additional people. People in other areas are also expected to remain in the open air areas.

The Nepalese Army is requesting additional shelter as it expects people to stay in the open overnight. National search and rescue (SAR) teams have been deployed. The Government of Nepal advised it dispatched military helicopters to assess damage and possibly provide emergency health assistance.

The Government has also asked the hospitals in affected areas, including Kathmandu, to remain on stand-by to treat the injured. No request for international SAR teams was made. International SAR teams, which remain in the country, were requested to support the response.

Ahead of humanitarian pause, Yemen sees 'deadliest' week of fighting – UN



Children play as a donkey cart passes destroyed buildings in the Al-Ora's neighbourhood of Zinjibar, Yemen.
Photo: UNHCR/A. Al-Sharif

12 May - Nearly 200 civilians have died in Yemen in the past week, as the country has seen its deadliest period of fighting since violence broke out on 26 March this year, according to figures released today by the United Nations human rights office.

In the six days from 4 May to 10 May, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said that at least 182 civilians have died, with 41 of those women and 51 children. In total, the Office verified the deaths of 828 civilians since 26 March, 182 of whom were children and 91 of whom were women. A further 1,511 people have been injured.

“A significant proportion of the casualties over this most recent six-day period – around half – were reportedly caused by airstrikes, especially in Sa’ada Governorate,” OHCHR spokesperson Rupert Colville told reporters in Geneva. “On one occasion, on 6 May, dozens of people fleeing fighting in Al-Tawahi District in Aden Governorate took to boats aiming for Djibouti, when they were shelled by mortars apparently fired by members of the Popular Committees affiliated with the Houthis. The boats caught fire and there were casualties.”

Civilian houses have been struck by airstrikes and ground fire, the Office reports, with at least 66 public buildings reported to have been partially or completely destroyed, as well as much civilian infrastructure.

“Given this alarming escalation, we welcome the announcement of a five-day humanitarian pause in Yemen, due to start today,” said Mr. Colville. “This should enable desperately needed aid operations to be carried out, and it is essential that it is honoured by all sides to the conflict.”

The pause comes as Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, arrived in the capital, Sana'a, where he hopes to meet the various Yemeni parties, in particular Houthi representatives, and the hope is that the pause can serve as a basis for a more permanent cessation of hostilities.

An aid shipment arrived at the port of Hodeida on Friday, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said today at the same briefing, adding that preparations were underway for a possible huge airlift of humanitarian aid if the pause in fighting holds.

The plan, according to spokesperson Adrian Edwards, is for three flights to bring in 300 tonnes of sleeping mats, blankets, kitchen sets and plastic sheeting.

“Hundreds of thousands of people across Yemen are struggling to meet their basic needs and are in desperate need of help,”

he said. "In addition to the flights, UNHCR will be seeking to distribute more of the aid we already have in Yemen, and to carry out rapid needs assessments in previously hard-to-reach areas. Our staff and partners are preparing to give relief kits out to tens of thousands of displaced people."

UNHCR also plans to use the pause in hostilities to transport and pre-position aid to Sana'a, Amran, Haradh and Aden for onward distribution to vulnerable populations in surrounding provinces. Medicines and rations will be sent to the Mayfa'a reception centre in the east, and food, kerosene and diesel will be transferred to the Kharaz refugee camp, near Aden.

"While a humanitarian pause falls short of the peace so vitally needed in Yemen, it is nonetheless critically important that aid gets through, as existing stocks in country are becoming depleted, adding to the suffering of civilians," Mr. Edwards said.

The World Food Programme (WFP) is also ready to distribute emergency food rations to more than 750,000 people in conflict-hit areas and is attempting to bring in fuel supplies to the country.

WFP has reached more than one million people in Yemen in the past month. The conflict has increased the number of hungry people and it is now estimated that 12 million people in Yemen are struggling to find their next meal.

Ahead of the pause in fighting, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) called on all parties to the conflict to protect Yemen's unique heritage amid reports of severe damage to cultural sites, including the old cities of Sana'a, which was heavily bombed on the night of 11 May, and the old city of Sa'ada.

"I condemn these destructions and I call on all parties to keep cultural heritage out of the conflict", said the Director-General, Irina Bokova, in a statement.

"I am particularly distressed by the news concerning air strikes on heavily populated areas such as the cities of Sana'a and Sa'ada. In addition to causing terrible human suffering, these attacks are destroying Yemen's unique cultural heritage, which is the repository of people's identity, history and memory and an exceptional testimony to the achievements of the Islamic Civilization".

Ms. Bokova stressed that all parties should respect their obligations under international treaties, particularly the 1954 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols, as well as the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

UN voices deep concern as deadly violence flares up across South Sudan

12 May - A deadly outburst of violence between residents of a United Nations protection-of-civilians (PoC) site in the South Sudanese capital of Juba has prompted the Organization's strong condemnation and triggered wider concern over the safety of internally displaced persons (IDPs) throughout the country.

According to a press release issued by the UN Mission in South Sudan earlier this morning, the fighting erupted on Friday, 8 May following a domestic dispute and steadily degenerated into a series of clashes between individuals wielding machetes, sticks and metal bars that continued throughout the weekend despite repeated interventions by UN peacekeepers.

One person was killed during the violence on Sunday and about 60 more were injured in the disturbances, which also provoked the departure of an estimated 3,500 IDPs from the protection sites.

The Mission noted that it had sought assurances from South Sudanese authorities about the safety and well-being of the IDPs who left the Mission's protection sites earlier this week, adding that "the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians continues to lie with the government of the Republic of South Sudan."



Newly displaced civilians from Sudan's Nuba Mountains approach Yida in South Sudan. Photo: UNHCR/S. KuirChok

In addition, the Mission reiterated its “long-standing policy” that all departures from UNMISS protection sites are done so on “a strictly voluntary basis,” and that it does not prevent IDPs from leaving its premises if that is their preference. In the meantime, the Mission said, it is engaging with community leaders in the Juba PoC sites to defuse the situation and avert a recurrence of the disturbances of this past weekend.

South Sudan has been in the grip of conflict since December 2013 – a conflict marked by brutal violence against civilians and deepening suffering across the country. The major humanitarian consequences are widespread displacement due to the violence, including high rates of death, disease, and injuries, severe food insecurity and disrupted livelihoods, and a major malnutrition crisis.

Some 119,000 people are sheltered in UNMISS compounds across the country while the Organization estimates that the number of people in need for 2015 will include an anticipated 1.95 million IDPs and a projected 293,000 refugees.

Last weekend's violence in Juba coincides with a deterioration of the security situation in South Sudan's northern Unity State. A series of “continuing and consistent reports” indicate, in fact, a surge in kidnappings and rapes and an overall uptick in violence, which has forced the UN and other aid agencies to withdraw staff from the region.

Addressing reporters at today's press briefing in Geneva, spokesman for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Rupert Colville, said his office remained “deeply concerned about the escalation of fighting in the strategic, oil-rich Unity State” and cited reports of killings, rape, abduction and looting of cattle and other property.

Mr. Colville explained that thousands of civilians have fled the attacks – with at least 2,200 new arrivals seeking refuge at UNMISS' PoC site in Bentiu as of 10 May, while others had fled or are in bushes between villages south of Nhialdiu and Koch, and Leer.

According to interviews with civilians who managed to flee, he added, perpetrators of these atrocities are Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) soldiers and armed youth. There are also mobilized youth reportedly clad in civilian clothes and wielding AK47s.

“Ahead of the rainy season, when people are planting crops, we urge absolute restraint by the parties to the conflict,” Mr. Colville concluded. “Attacks on civilian lives and infrastructure amount to clear violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and must be investigated.”

In Geneva, UN envoy continues Syria consultations with national and regional stakeholders

12 May - The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, is continuing his meetings in Geneva aimed at bringing a political solution to the ongoing crisis in the Middle Eastern country, a spokesperson for the Organization confirmed today.

Briefing journalists in New York, Stéphane Dujarric, the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, said that, as part of the ongoing Geneva Consultations, Mr. de Mistura met with a number of regional and national stakeholders, including Louay Hussain, Chairman of the Building the Syrian State political party; Hassan Abdel Azim, Chairman of the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC); and with a Turkish delegation headed by Can Dizdar, Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

According to Mr. Dujarric, Mr. Dizdar also shared his Government's perspectives on the implementation of the Geneva Communique and the situation in Syria.

In addition, Mr. de Mistura met with a French delegation headed by Nicolas de Rivière, Director General of Political Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with whom he discussed the French Government's views on the need for an urgent political solution in Syria. The two officials also touched upon recent developments in and around Syria, which may affect prospects for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the UN spokesperson noted.

At the conclusion of today's consultations, Mr. de Mistura reportedly said that it remains critical to reach out to Syrian political actors as no one more than the Syrians themselves recognize the urgency of bringing the conflict to end.

The Geneva Communiqué was adopted after the first international meeting on the issue on 30 June 2012, and since endorsed by the UN Security Council.

The document lays out key steps in a process to end the violence. Among others, it calls for the establishment of a transitional governing body, with full executive powers and made up by members of the present Government and the opposition and other groups, as part of agreed principles and guidelines for a Syrian-led political transition.

UN agency urges South-East Asian governments to strengthen relief efforts to smugglers



Fishing boats such as these, beached on a strip of coast in Teknaf, Bangladesh, are often used to ferry passengers to larger vessels in the Bay of Bengal bound for Thailand or Malaysia. Photo: UNHCR/S. Alam

12 May - Amid continuing reports that thousands of people are stranded on smugglers' boats in Southeast Asian waters, the United Nations refugee agency today called on governments in the region to ramp up search-and-rescue operations between the Andaman Sea and the Straits of Malacca.

"Through various sources we've been alerted that there could be more such boats in the region that still need to be located and helped," Adrian Edwards, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told journalists today during the regular briefing at the UN Office in Geneva.

The first priority, he stressed, is humanitarian relief, followed by the identification of those in need of international protection.

While hailing the recent rescue of hundreds of people off the coast of Indonesia, UNHCR encouraged governments in the area to beef up efforts to save lives and keep borders open.

"We are appealing to governments to continue their life-saving operations to find and safely disembark the passengers," said Mr. Edwards.

Several thousand passengers, mainly Rohingya and Bangladeshi nationals, are thought to be adrift at sea after smugglers abandoned them to avoid crackdowns in Thailand and Malaysia, according to UNHCR's partner the Arakan Project.

In addition, the UN refugee agency noted that many of the passengers are in a weakened state after days, possibly weeks with little food and water.

"UNHCR urges against indefinite detention of those rescued, who should be given access to basic rights and services including family unification, shelter, healthcare and where possible, the right to work while longer-term solutions are sought," Mr. Edwards underscored.

Meanwhile, the UN agency has been on the ground talking to survivors in support of government efforts.

For example, in Thailand, UNHCR teams are distributing aid and providing counselling to over 230 smugglers, who have surrendered themselves to the police recently after escaping or being abandoned in smugglers' camps.

In Indonesia, UNHCR has sent a team to Lhoksukon in northern Aceh to assist the Government in interviewing groups rescued by the Indonesian navy over the weekend and protect them.

According to Mr. Edwards, UNHCR staff is currently in Langkawi, Malaysia to meet with the authorities and local contacts.

1,093 people, mostly Rohingya, arrived by boat in Langkawi on Sunday night. They are in fair condition and have been seen

by doctors, given their ordeal.

“We are aware of the challenges of managing such a humanitarian emergency, and we have offered our assistance to the government,” said Mr. Edwards, adding that “we stand ready to participate with the authorities in providing humanitarian assistance.”

UN mission ‘strongly deplores’ deteriorating tensions in Sudan’s Darfur region



Photo: UNAMID

12 May - The joint United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) has strongly deplored “the rapid deterioration of tensions” between the Rezeigat and Ma’alia tribes as both parties continue to engage each other in a series of armed confrontations which have resulted in dozens of casualties.

In a press release, the Mission said it remained “gravely concerned” about that apparent continued mobilization of both sides despite a temporary lull in the fighting, adding that UNAMID peacekeepers in East Darfur had “raised their levels of preparedness” and put in place “proactive response measures” to address any spike in requests for civilian protection.

“UNAMID continues to exert around-the-clock efforts to mitigate the impact of fighting on the civilian population in the area,” the press release continued. “The Mission is ready to assist the Sudanese authorities in the ongoing evacuation of more than 50 injured tribesmen from both tribes to Khartoum for treatment.”

In addition, the Mission explained it had also provided East Darfur State medical authorities with medicines and other surgical equipment which were in short supply.

UN health agency draws lessons from Ebola to prepare roadmap for future epidemics

12 May - The World Health Organization (WHO) today concluded a meeting on Ebola research and development to look at lessons learned from the outbreak and develop a roadmap for future epidemics so that “we can be better prepared, faster, and more effective” in the next global health emergency.

“If something like Ebola ever happens again, the world needs to be ready with a blueprint for an R&D (research and development) preparedness plan with clear rules, platforms for information sharing, established processes to expedite development and clinical trials – to activate coordinated action and limit the damage,” Dr. Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Innovation, told reporters on the outcome of the

Summit on Ebola Research and Development.

The 11-12 May meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, took place as an independent panel of experts tasked to assess the UN global health agency’s response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa concluded in a report that “at present, WHO does not have the operational capacity or culture to deliver a full emergency public health response” and urged investments by its member States to make it fit for purpose.

At the press conference today, Dr. Kieny said “Ebola is not the only epidemic-prone disease for which there are no medicines, vaccines or diagnostics. Nor is this the first time the world has been caught unprepared in the face of an epidemic.”

“With more frequent travel, globalized trade and greater interconnectedness between countries, disease outbreaks that once used to be localized and quickly extinguished now have a much greater chance of spreading more widely,” she said.



Even though WHO has declared Liberia free of Ebola virus transmission, the agency will maintain an enhanced staff presence in the country until the end of 2015, especially on the borders with Sierra Leone and Guinea. Photo: WHO/R. Sorensen

“Therefore, we as a global community need to be prepared for such a possibility in the future.”

To date, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa has affected more than 26,000 people and left some 11,000 dead.

Dr. Kieny went on to say the Geneva meeting aimed “to come up with a new framework for R&D for diseases with epidemic potential and other health threats, so that next time we can be better prepared, faster, and more effective.”

WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan, in the meeting’s opening remarks on Monday, said that the Ebola R&D effort has mobilized people, institutions and resources in ways never before seen in an “otherwise horrific human calamity” and noted that the world was “likely very close to having a vaccine that can protect against Ebola.”

Dr. Kieny elaborated on those remarks today, saying that “this joining of forces from all corners of the world and different sectors accelerating all actions – we now have commercial diagnostics to detect Ebola, and at least 2 possibly effective vaccines. These results would normally have taken five to 10 years. All this was done in less than 10 months.”

“Even as Ebola wanes and some of the R&D efforts may not reach the goals aspired, the pioneering work done so far can be leveraged to put in place standards and best practices to improve expedited data and results sharing,” she said.

Bosnia and Herzegovina must take 'fresh chance' it has been given, Security Council told



High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, briefs the Security Council during its regular meeting on the situation in the country.
UN Photo/Loey Felipe

12 May - As Bosnia and Herzegovina readies to mark the 20th anniversary of the end of the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the Second World War, it must seize the opportunity to “finally say farewell to the politics of the past” and decisively commit to a new way of doing politics that puts the interests of citizens firmly in first place, the United Nations Security Council heard today.

“Peace is of course a priceless commodity. It should never be taken for granted. But it is the base, not the end state,” the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, told the Council during the 15-member body’s regular meeting on the situation in the country.

It is “entirely right” that after 20 years, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina – especially the young – expect “so much more” from their country and their politicians. “From the highest young unemployment rate in Europe and many of them are leaving the country,” Mr. Inzko added.

In July, Bosnia and Herzegovina will mark the 20th year anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide and in November, the Dayton/Paris peace Accords that ushered in peace to the region.

“So what needs to happen in the next six months is to mark the 20th with a sense of renewed optimism about the future?” he asked.

“The answer is very simple. We need to see the newly elected authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina come together to deliver steps to take advantage of European Union (EU) initiative for Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

“Bosnia and Herzegovina has been given a fresh chance and it must be taken,” said the High Representative, emphasizing that the EU initiative offers the country a chance to end years of stagnation.

The good news is that the Government is showing signs that they are ready to implement the written agreement that was adopted in March and has opened the way for the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU to enter into force.

However, he said that progress will require concrete results, some of which will be very difficult to deliver. This includes creating new jobs, improving functionality of institutions and the rule of law when it comes to fighting crime and corruption.

“I believe that a great deal can be achieved in 2015 if there is renewed commitment within the country and among its political leaders to pull together and work together, to work as one,” the High Representative said.

“The alternative is to continue doing what we have seen over and over again: to continue politics from the past that has [driven] the country ever deeper into the crisis at the expense of all its citizens, especially the young,” Mr. Inzko added.

There are politicians, however, who may be tempted to follow the “negative and dangerous path,” he said, pointing to recent developments that have directly challenged the Peace Agreement. Of particular concern is the Declaration adopted by the RS National Assembly that challenges the authority of the BiH Constitutional Court. Also of concern is another party document that threatens to hold an independence referendum in Republika Srpska in 2018.

“As I have made clear repeatedly, the Peace Agreement does not grant the Entities the right to secede, and any attempt to change the Peace Agreement requires the agreement of all parties,” he said.

“The drawing of borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina is behind us. Division and secession are failed strategies that were defeated twenty years ago. Their place is in history books,” the High Representative declared, stressing: “This is the era not of division but of renewed bridge-building. The expanding force of forward-looking people in Bosnia and Herzegovina is getting ever stronger by the day.”

Apart from the parties within the country, Mr. Inzko said the international community is “duty bound to recognize the importance of this moment,” and do all it could to help the forces of positive change in Bosnia and Herzegovina reach their “surge capacity.”

UN expert calls on Greek Government to ‘urgently implement’ anti-racism measures



Asylum-seekers in a holding centre on Greece's Samos Island. Photo: UNHCR/A. D'Amato

12 May - The Government of Greece must implement stronger measures in order to effectively address hate speech and verbal abuse against vulnerable groups including irregular migrants and minorities such as the Roma people, according to a United Nations human rights expert.

“Combating hate and prejudice is not just about financial resources, and in times of economic crisis, scapegoating the most vulnerable members of society only contributes to reinforcing a climate of hostility and violence towards such groups and individuals,” the UN Special Rapporteur on racism, Mutuma Ruteere, said in a news release issued earlier today and coming on the heels of his five-day visit to the Mediterranean country.

As Greece continues to reel from the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, it also remains on the frontline of the European Union’s ongoing irregular migration crisis.

According to UN data, 2015 alone has already seen some 40,000 people make crossings to Italy and Greece – the first and second largest countries of arrival respectively. The numbers have also been recently picking up as weather conditions in the Mediterranean improve.

In the press release, Mr. Ruteere nevertheless praised the Greeks’ “continuous and committed hospitality” and noted that citizens had been “displaying efforts to save migrants from drowning and providing them with basic necessities despite strained resources due to the long lasting economic crisis.”

Against that backdrop, the Special Rapporteur also welcomed efforts and initiatives made by the Government of Greece to address the scourge of racist violence affecting minority groups across the country – including reforming the legal framework and establishing strong and credible human rights institutions. But, he warned, much still remained to be done.

“The Romas of Greece, while being, for the vast majority Greek citizens, continue to face rampant discrimination and remain economically and socially disadvantaged,” he continued. “I call upon the Government to take into account and

urgently implement the numerous recommendations made by UN and European mechanisms.”

Along with those mechanisms, he urged Athens to establish more efficient outlets for victims to seek remedies and ensure their access to justice while also creating an independent body to guarantee transparency and credibility of investigations into police violence.

The Special Rapporteur will present a final report on his visit to the UN Human Rights Council in 2016.

INTERVIEW: UN official cites 'growing impatience' by States for nuclear disarmament

12 May - Nuclear disarmament, as envisioned in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), has simply not occurred, according to senior United Nations official Angela Kane, who cites a “growing impatience” by the non-nuclear-weapon States for the nuclear-weapon States to disarm.



Angela Kane, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Ms. Kane has served as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for the past three years, a period during which, she says, the very deep gap between the nuclear-weapon States and the non-nuclear-weapon States has grown even wider. As the 189 States parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) meet in New York for the review conference that is held every five years, the veteran UN official spoke to the *UN News Centre* about developments in this area.

She also discusses her career at the UN, where she has served for the past 38 years in a number of senior positions and from which she will depart at the end of this month. The German national has served on almost every continent and has vast experience ranging from political affairs, peacekeeping, public information and management. *The interview has been edited for content and clarity.*

UN News Centre: You’ll soon be leaving after a long and impressive career with the UN. When did you join the Organization?

Angela Kane: I joined in 1977. I found myself in New York. I didn’t have a work visa and I thought well, maybe I can find something at the United Nations. So there was an employment office at the time. You had two books – one was for General Service; but if you had a graduate university degree, you could look in the other book. That’s where I looked. I found out it’s not that easy, it’s not like you find something and you immediately apply. But I was very lucky. I passed an exam, a test they had at the time, and I got a job very, very quickly. I started at that time as an editor-writer for the United Nations Yearbook in DPI (Department of Public Information). I stayed there for less than a year because then I was asked to compete for another job in the Secretary-General’s Office, which I got. So then I moved to the Secretary-General’s Office which was a very interesting experience – as a P-2, the lowest professional level, and then to all of a sudden be on the 38th floor.

UN News Centre: What have been the most important developments in the area of disarmament over the past three years during which you’ve served as High Representative?

Angela Kane: What I have seen over the last three years has really been a very deep gap that has opened even wider between the nuclear-weapon States and the non-nuclear-weapon States. There’s a growing impatience by the non-nuclear-weapon States for the nuclear-weapon States to disarm, to actually have nuclear disarmament as it was agreed in the Non-Proliferation Treaty. And that has simply not occurred.

The numbers of the nuclear weapons have gone down, particularly since the Cold War period. But after the expectations when US President Obama came into office with very high promises, particularly in the nuclear disarmament field, that has fizzled to a tremendous degree. And that has been very regrettable because it means that the relationship between the non-nuclear-weapon States and the nuclear-weapon States has become more difficult. That is shown particularly right now during the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, which happens every five years.

UN News Centre: What is the biggest contribution that the United Nations can make to global disarmament efforts?

Angela Kane: We are not the ones who actually can disarm but we can advocate and we can make a case for it. I think that that has been very effective. The Secretary-General is someone who is very interested in disarmament efforts. He was the first Secretary-General ever to visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I remember when he entrusted me with this job, the first thing he said to me was ‘You must go to Hiroshima and Nagasaki,’ because seeing it yourself with your own eyes and seeing the peace museum and meeting with the Hibakusha, the survivors of the atomic bombing, is extremely emotional and basically brings home what happened there and what we must do in order to avoid another instance ever of an explosion of an atomic bomb. And I did that. I went the first year and it does leave you very humbled in terms of what the people have experienced and also it strengthens your resolve to say ‘never again.’

But what we can do, as I said, is advocate and that’s what we do, I hope effectively. Not everyone may like our position but, on the other hand, we try to basically make sure that to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war also applies to not having a possibility of having a nuclear war.

UN News Centre: You’ve had a wide-ranging career with the United Nations, including in peacekeeping, political affairs and public information. Where do you think you’ve made the most difference?

Angela Kane: Whatever I did I always tried to make a difference because that’s really worthwhile when you work. I was never content to just sit there and fulfil a mandate that I had been given. I’ve always been ‘rattling the cage,’ as they say, and that’s something that is not always liked in the United Nations. I think someone who kind of follows the script and follows it as it goes along is usually safer. But safe was never my motto. I will give you one example, and then I’ll give you another one from the political field. I joined DPI in mid ‘95 and the UN website had just been launched. That was a great achievement. It was terrific; it was early; it was pioneering. I joined the week it was launched. It had a couple of pages; it was rudimentary but, as I said, it was very much pioneering.

After about a month, I said to the Under-Secretary-General – it was Samir Sanbar at the time – ‘What is being done to develop this?’ It was like tuning into the same television programme every single day. And he said, ‘What do you mean?’ And I said, ‘Well you need to develop more.’ And he said, ‘Do you know anything about it?’ I said, ‘Well, I’ve never done it but I’m interested in it.’ And he said, ‘Fine, you got it.’

So all of a sudden, I was in charge of developing the UN website. And it was a fantastic experience because you had people who were so enthusiastic about the project. We learned, at that time, HTML. We had a snowball effect. We got pages together. We changed it several times. We redesigned it. Then we launched it in French. Then there was pressure to launch it in other languages. It was a wonderful team effort... you know it’s not like we were going home at 5:30... but because people were so passionate about it... and that was one of the most heady experiences that I think, at the time, was so worthwhile. But it swallowed me. It was very, very difficult because there were other tasks that needed to be done, but this was really so intense and it was just kind of at the cusp of this major explosion in the Internet. It was part of a revolution that I’m still very, very proud of.

Every job that I have done, particularly in political affairs, you often don’t see the ‘successes’ because it’s not very visible. It’s very rare that you have a breakthrough. One of the early experiences I had was to work with Alvaro de Soto [Special Advisor to UN Secretary-General] on the El Salvador peace accords. That was ground-breaking. He did all of the work, all of the negotiations. But he said to me, ‘You need to basically be my person in New York. I’m mostly in the field negotiating with the Government and the rebels, but I need someone I can bounce ideas off.’ He would then bounce off ideas saying, ‘We’ve run up against a problem in the negotiations. Can you find a solution to it?’ And that was very creative. I mean it was fascinating. I loved that.

And then he said to me, ‘We need a whole chapter in the peace accords on how to establish a national civil police, and can you do something about this?’ I knew nothing about how to establish a national civil police. I put together a team and then travelled to El Salvador and we actually put together, with the help of this team, the chapter on the national civil police in the El Salvador peace accords. That was something that was very tangible.

The other example that I wanted to give you is the Syria chemical weapons investigation. It was something that I certainly did not expect when the Secretary-General entrusted me with the job and it took over my life for all of 2013. I think that the



investigation was really ground-breaking because we'd never had an investigation according to a mechanism that was established by the General Assembly in which, after a very short period of time, the team went there with a lot of personal danger to themselves and established that chemical weapons were in fact used in the vicinity of Damascus.

UN News Centre: From your experience, is the Organization doing enough to promote the advancement of women within its own ranks?

Angela Kane: Now it is. I think that Secretary-General Ban has really made tremendous strides in appointing more senior women, particularly at the Assistant Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General levels. But it could be more at the lower levels. When I started there were very few women. There were certainly no role models. I don't think I ever had a woman as a boss because they just didn't exist. There was still this feeling of, 'Well can you really entrust a woman with certain responsibilities?' I remember when I became an Assistant Secretary-General in the Department of Political Affairs. I was responsible for everything except Africa, south of North Africa. And people said to me, 'Well how can you do this job because you have to deal with people in the Middle East and would they accept you as a woman?' I have never had a problem because if you have a mandate and if you have an authority, you simply exercise that authority. But y

ou don't ask people whether they agree with whether you're a woman or a man. So if you're afraid of tackling that, you shouldn't take that job.

But it is true that there is primarily, still in many ways, a male culture. But it has changed tremendously over the last couple of years. And I'm very happy to see that. I think there could also be more done in terms of encouraging women to take on more responsibility. That is not happening enough. I find that you have to expose yourself. You have to go out there. You have to talk. You always have to volunteer for something. I volunteered on I don't know how many boards and committees – none of which were in my job description – but simply because I always wanted to learn something. I think that's what needs to be done more but that's an initiative that every woman herself must take...

Also, DPI has the Speakers Bureau and they're always asking for people to speak to various groups. Now you try that once, because you also have to speak to teenagers who are coming to the UN and they're kind of sitting there with their blackberry or iPhone, and they're not really interested in what you're saying. You try to capture their attention. It's a great training ground for speaking publicly. Because I still find that women are more reluctant to speak up in meetings, and that's a shame because I believe that they do have a lot to say. Sometimes maybe the male says it better or the male says it first. But on the other hand, this is something that I think really has to happen.

I was the Deputy SRSR in a peacekeeping mission – 4,500 troops – and I had to go out and speak to them all the time. This was in Ethiopia/Eritrea. So basically, here you go, and again, the hurdle that I had to overcome... I had to learn about military ranks... and how many people are in a battalion... what is a lieutenant colonel versus a colonel... I've never been in the military so how was I supposed to know? So that was something that I had to learn about. But, on the other hand, that's just a learning curve that you do very quickly. But you have to have the courage to then go and to address troops.



Feature: Generation at risk - UN Forum urges action to halt indigenous youth suicide



Indigenous children walk home from school in the district of Huallanca, Peru. Classes are taught in Spanish, and students who speak only their native Quechua have difficulty understanding their lessons, resulting in high drop-out rates, says the UN Children's Fund. UNICEF/NYHQ2011-1606/LeMoyné

12 May - For centuries, indigenous peoples around the world have been forced to wage an existential struggle to protect their ways of life and the very fabric of their societies.

Now, indigenous youth face additional risk as a wave of suicide and self-harm is ravaging communities in every region of the world, particularly in the Arctic, the Americas and the Pacific, says the United Nations.

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues took a look at this trend at its recent session, in New York, and recommended a range of actions to be undertaken by countries, and by the UN, to put a halt to the scourge of indigenous youth suicide.

The Permanent Forum - which advises the UN's Economic and Social Council on indigenous concerns - also called on countries to recognize that suicidal behaviour and self-harm are directly linked to historical injustices by colonial Powers, such as dispossession of

lands and resources and denial of human rights, combined with the loss of self-identification and a departure from the roots of traditional culture and ways of life.

The UN News Centre spoke with some of the participants in the Permanent Forum who offered personal insights into the causes of indigenous youth suicide and self-harm, and steps that could be taken to end it.

Credit: United Nations

International community must be proactive in helping Libya restore peace – ICC Prosecutor

12 May - With the security situation in Libya quickly deteriorating, the international community must be more proactive in exploring solutions in order to tangibly help the North African nation restore stability and strengthen accountability, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) told the United Nations Security Council today.

“Innocent civilians continue to bear the brunt of the deteriorating security situation,” said Fatou Bensouda as she presented her latest report to the 15-member Council.

In the aftermath of the 2011 civil war in Libya, the Council decided to refer the situation in the country to the Court. A formal investigation was opened by the ICC Prosecutor in March 2011, and to date, three arrest warrants have been issued: against former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi; Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi; and Abdullah Al-Senussi.

“Libya continues to be split, with two governments vying for legitimacy,” the ICC Prosecutor added.

Ms. Bensouda said her Office has encouraged the formation of an ‘international contact group’ on justice issues through which material, legal and other support could be provided to Libya.

She also proposed that a willing State, with substantial experience in transitional justice, to consider partnering with Libya to explore more concretely how such a contact group might be brought to life in the near future.

“It is crucial for such efforts to include local actors, so that their voices and views on achieving justice are amplified and heard,” Ms. Bensouda added, commending the efforts of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).



Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Fatou Bensouda. UN Photo/Loey Felipe

The ICC Prosecutor also reiterated the need for Libyan authorities to facilitate a visit by representatives from the local councils of Misrata and Tawergha to meet because facilitating a solution for the Tawergha issue is of “symbolic importance and resonance.”

Ms. Bensouda also took note of relevant Security Council resolutions on the Libya situation which have also stressed the important of the Libyan government’s full cooperation with the ICC and with her Office.

On the use of violence against civilians by groups purportedly claiming allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), she said that while ICC jurisdiction over Libya extends to such alleged crimes, it is the State that bears primary responsibility to prosecute perpetrators.

Furthermore, she expressed concern about alleged indiscriminate attacks in heavily populated areas that have resulted in civilian casualties whether in Benghazi, Tripoli, Warshefana, and in the Nafusa Mountains.

“I reiterate my call to all parties involved in the conflict to refrain from targeting civilians,” Ms. Bensouda urged.

UNESCO chief denounces the murder of Mexican journalist

12 May - While stressing the need to end impunity of crimes against media workers, the head of the United Nations agency charged with promoting press freedom urged today a full inquiry into the killing of journalist Armando Saldaña Morales in Mexico.

Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), denounced the murder and called on the authorities to “conduct a thorough investigation” into the incident.



Stop killing journalists. Photo: UNESCO

Mr. Saldaña Morales was the host of a news programme at La Ke Buena 100.9 FM radio station in the town of Tierra Blanca in Veracruz State. He also worked for a number of other media outlets, notably El Mundo de Córdoba, El Sol de Córdoba, La Crónica de Tierra Blanca and Radio Max.

Ms. Bokova underscored, “crimes against journalists affect the whole of society and limit our ability as citizens to make informed choices. For this reason, it is essential that such crimes do not go unpunished.”

On 4 May, police found Mr. Saldaña Morales in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico.

The Director-General of UNESCO issues statements on the killing of media workers in line with resolution 29 adopted by UNESCO member States at the organization’s General Conference of 1997, entitled “Condemnation of Violence against Journalists.”

These statements are posted on a dedicated webpage.

UN human rights office draws attention to 'alarming' reports of massacre in Angola

12 May - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) today urged the Angolan Government to ensure “a truly meaningful, independent, thorough investigation” into reports of an alleged massacre in the central province of Huambo with “wildly differing” casualty figures.

“We understand that a Government inquiry has been launched into the incident, and we urge the Government to ensure that a truly meaningful, independent, thorough investigation is conducted with a view to ensuring accountability,” OHCHR spokesperson Rupert Colville told reporters at the regular UN press briefing in Geneva.



Rupert Colville, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

According to the Government, Mr. Colville said, nine police officers and 13 civilians were killed in a confrontation when police attempted to arrest the leader of a religious sect called “Luz du Mundo” (Light of the World).

“But other accounts of the incident claim that hundreds of followers of the sect were killed,” he said. “There are even accounts suggesting the number may exceed 1,000.”

Mr. Colville went on to say that “recent editorials and reports in [Angolan] state media condemning the sect have been very worryingly virulent.”

“We understand that some members of the sect and their families may have gone into hiding out of fear of further violence,” he said.