

Expressing concern about planned Israeli settlements, UN urges return to negotiations

1 February 2017 – The recent announcement by the Israeli Government to advance 5,000 settlement units in the occupied West Bank could be an “obstacle” to peace, the spokesperson for the United Nations Secretary-General today said.

In a statement, Stéphane Dujarric, reiterated that unilateral actions threaten to unravel plans for a two-State solution between Israelis and Palestinians.

“We once again warn against any unilateral actions that can be an obstacle to a negotiated two-state solution,” Mr. Dujarric said.

He added that the UN calls on both parties to return to “meaningful negotiations” based on relevant Security Council resolutions and in accordance with international law, and is ready to support that process.

UN agency creates tool box of new technologies, good practices to help keep food safe

1 February 2017 – From avian flu to locusts and E. coli bacteria, food is contaminated every day by diseases and pests, leading the United Nations agricultural agency to create a set of emergency prevention tools to save lives and improve food safety and security.

“We believe it’s important for sectors involved in food production, processing and marketing to watch out for current and potential threats and respond to them in a concerted manner,” said the Assistant Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Ren Wang.

The UN agency, in the recently published *Averting risks to the food chain* “It’s important for sectors involved in food production, processing and marketing to watch out for current and potential threats and respond to them”, show that preventing, early warning, preparedness, good food chain crisis management and good practices can help to stop the diseases and pests that ravage food chains.

One of the key messages from the report is that an integrated approach which covers all the stages from prevention to timely response is needed to curb food chain crises caused by transboundary animal diseases to plant pests and diseases.

Among the biggest pests that the FAO is focusing on is the desert locust, which affects more than 65 per cent of the world's poorest countries and is considered the most dangerous of all migratory pest species in the world.

Able to consume its own weight in fresh food per day, a typical 1 km size swarm of locusts or roughly 40 million locusts can eat the same amount as 35,000 people, 20 camels or six elephants.

The FAO is using the eLocust3 system, which records and transmits data from crop pest monitoring in good time, to improve monitoring and prevention of locusts in 19 of the most vulnerable countries.

Meanwhile, in Mali, Uganda and Tanzania, livestock farmers are using the EMA – i app to collect animal disease information from the field on their smartphones. The data is sent in real-time to the Global Animal Disease Information System (EMPRES-i) at FAO, where it is shared at national, regional and global levels, facilitating analysis in a timely manner in order to provide a very rapid response to attack the disease at the very early stage of birth.

Another tool in the FAO report is sharing information through regional veterinary lab networks in Africa and Asia. There are 32 labs in African countries and 17 in Asian countries. By working more closely together, scientists can trace the outbreak and prevent it from infecting animals in other countries in the region.

Given that a third of global crop production is lost annually due to insects and plant diseases that can spread to multiple countries and through continents, by sharing information, experts can develop standardized protocols and train response workers regionally, as well as have international standards for any tests.

US travel ban a 'significant setback' for those needing international protection – UN rights experts

1 February 2017 – Expressing concern that a new Executive Order by the United States President Donald Trump is in breach of the country's human rights commitments, a group of United Nations rights experts have called on the US to live up to its human rights obligations and provide protection for those

fleeing persecution and conflicts.

Such an order is clearly discriminatory based on one's nationality and leads to increased stigmatization of Muslim communities," said the UN Special Rapporteurs on migrant, François Crépeau; on racism, Mutuma Ruteere; on human rights and counter-terrorism, Ben Emmerson; on torture, Nils Melzer; and on freedom of religion, Ahmed Shaheed, in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The US recent policy on immigration also risks people being returned, without proper individual assessments and asylum procedures, to places in which they risk being subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, in direct contravention of international humanitarian and human rights laws which uphold the principle of non-refoulement," they warned.

The Executive Order, signed by President Trump on 27 January bars all nationals from seven Muslim-majority countries — Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen — from entering the US for the next 90 days.

It also stops the entire US refugee programme for 120 days, indefinitely bans Syrian refugees, and halts the planned entry of more than 50,000 refugees in the US fiscal year 2017, which began in October 2016 and will end in September 2017, according to the news release.

In the midst of the world's greatest migration crisis since World War II, this is a significant setback for those who are obviously in need of international protection

Noting that "in the midst of the world's greatest migration crisis since World War II, this is a significant setback for those who are obviously in need of international protection," the rights experts stressed: "The US must live up to its international obligations and provide protection for those fleeing persecution and conflicts."

The US is also involved in conflicts such as those in Iraq and Syria and its responsibility must extend to offering refuge to those fleeing from the conflicts," they added.

According to the news release, the Executive Order also applies to those who come from the countries listed — whether or not they have valid visa documents or are in transit.

It also affects those who have dual nationality, who either have a passport from one of those countries or are travelling from one of those countries. Furthermore, those currently residing in the US may be able to fly to the US but entry is not guaranteed.

This is deeply troubling, and we are additionally concerned that such persons travelling to the US will be subject to detention for an undefined

period of time and then ultimately deported,” the human rights experts said.

Independent experts and Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva based UN Human Rights Council – an inter-governmental body responsible for promoting and protecting human rights around the world – to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

With fewer people active, UN health agency urges people to get moving

1 February 2017 – Not enough exercise contributes to cancer, diabetes, depression and other non-communicable diseases, according to the United Nations health agency, which is urging people to get up and get active.

According to a new document the World Health Organization (WHO), less and less people are active in many countries with nearly a quarter of all adults and more than 80 per cent of adolescents being too sedentary.

WHO's *Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013-2020* recommends that inactive people start with “small amounts of physical activity” and then gradually increase duration, frequency and intensity over time.

Physical activity can be any activity, not just sport, that uses energy – from playing and doing household chores to gardening and dancing.

“Any activity, be it for work, to walk or cycle to and from places, or as part of leisure time, has a health benefit,” according to the UN agency.

Ukraine: UN 'gravely concerned' by deteriorating situation amid flare-up of violence in Donetsk

31 January 2017 – Amid outburst of violence in Ukraine, the United Nations Security Council and the top humanitarian official there expressed grave

concern today about the “dangerous deterioration” of the situation in the country’s eastern region and its severe impact on the local civilian population.

In a press statement, Council members condemned the use of weapons prohibited by the Minsk agreements along the contact line in Donetsk region that lead to deaths and injuries, including among civilians.

The members of the Security Council expressed their full support of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and underlined the need for strict compliance with resolution 2202 (2015), which endorsed the “Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements,” aimed at ending the violence in eastern regions of Ukraine.

“The members of the Security Council called for an immediate return to a ceasefire regime,” the statement concluded.

Earlier in the day, the humanitarian community and the Humanitarian Coordinator in the country also expressed grave concern by the “drastic deterioration” of the security situation in eastern Ukraine and its humanitarian consequences.

In a statement issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the UN and its aid partners in the county expressed particular concern about the impact on the civilian population on both sides of the ‘contact line.’”

Casualties continue to be recorded. Sustained targeting of and damages to civilian infrastructure adds to the already difficult conditions. This situation, they said, is exacerbated by the harsh winter, and may have irrevocable consequences. “The Government of Ukraine is doing its utmost to provide support and to coordinate humanitarian efforts.”

The humanitarian community stressed that due to the shelling, the Donetsk Filter Station (DFS) stopped working on yesterday, leaving some 15,000 to 17,000 people in Avdiivka without water, and potentially affecting up to 400,000 people served by the facility.

Moreover, on 30 January the fourth power line to the Avdiivka coke plant was damaged by shelling, leaving it without power, and further impacting on the supply of hot water. Urgent repairs are needed to restart the heating system. With temperatures falling well below -10 degrees Celsius, should the heating system stop working it will freeze and will require weeks to restart.

In Donetsk, city water is being redistributed from Verkhniokalmiuska Filter station, and other cities are surviving by using local water reservoirs designed to provide 24 hours of storage. In villages such as Vasylivka, Spartak, Verkhnotoretske and Kruta Balka water delivery has stopped altogether, and in part of Yasynuvata water is now cut.

“An immediate cessation of hostilities is urgently needed to prevent further loss of lives and to enable repair teams to urgently restore critical basic services to hundreds of thousands of affected civilians living in -10 below

zero temperature," said Humanitarian Coordinator Neal Walker.