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12 January 2018 –

Migration, sustaining peace and development are among the priorities of the United Nations General Assembly for the remainder of the current session through September 2018, the President of the main UN deliberative and policymaking body said Friday.

“We are nearly four months into the 72nd Session of the General Assembly. And I believe we can say we have achieved a lot in this time,” said Miroslav Lajčák in his briefing to UN Member States, noting that the body has already adopted more than 250 resolutions and a new regular budget for 2018-2019 period, among other accomplishments.

“We need to see these eight months as an opportunity; as a chance to ensure that, when we get to September 2018, we will have even more achievements to point to,” he added.

Such achievements would include, he said, agreement on the world's first-ever [Global Compact on Migration](#).

When negotiations on the Compact begin on 20 February, Member States will all have to compromise and mobilize support at home, he said, adding that an agreement must be in place in July so that the compact will be adopted in December.

A second achievement relates to sustaining peace, and he will convene a high-level meeting on peacebuilding and sustaining peace on 24 and 25 April, he said.

On this subject, he stressed the need for a stronger focus on conflict prevention. “We should be acting faster, and sooner, when there is a peace to keep – rather than scrambling for solutions once it has been lost,” he said.

Underscoring the importance of partnerships and the participation of women and youth, he also highlighted the need for better financing for the chronically underfunded UN peacebuilding and sustaining peace activities, and the need to integrate UN efforts in this regard.

“Sustaining peace is not a task for one office, or one team at the United Nations. Instead, it must be mainstreamed [...] Everything the United Nations does must be seen through a lens of peace,” he said.

As for development, he plans to convene three major events in the resumed part of the session. The first will focus on water. On 22 March, he will convene a high-level launch of the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Sustainable Development.'

The second event will be a youth dialogue on 30 May. A wide range of topics will be covered – from education, employment and opportunities, to prevention of violent extremism and radicalization.

The third contribution from his Office to the ongoing implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) is an event on financing on 11 June. It should act as a platform for stronger public-private partnerships.

The discussions and outcomes of these events will feed into the High-Level Political Forum in July.

The process to revitalize the work of the General Assembly demands our continued attention. This is the most representative body in the world – and one in which we all have a stake UN General Assembly
President Lajčák

Mr. Lajčák said he also intends to focus on human rights “because there can be neither peace nor development without respect for dignity and fundamental rights.”

“That is why human rights must be mainstreamed throughout all of our activities – from peacebuilding and sustaining peace, to [SDGs](#) implementation and migration.

Important tasks remain to be done for UN reform. The first round of intergovernmental negotiations for Security Council reform will take place at the end of January.

After the Secretary-General's concrete proposals to reposition the UN development system are considered by the Economic and Social Council in February and March, the General Assembly will have an important role to play.

As for management reform, further discussions will be needed once the Secretary-General submits his comprehensive report. And work must continue on the reform of the UN's peace and security pillar once the Secretary-General submits his second report.

Mr. Lajčák stressed the need to revitalize the work of the General Assembly, as it the most representative body in the world.

The Assembly's agenda also includes many mandated processes, such as planning for the diplomatic conference on a legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction.

Preparations for the first-ever high-level meeting on ending tuberculosis

will also begin. And the Assembly will also convene the first comprehensive review of the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, and organize the first informal interactive hearings with indigenous people, on the margins of the [Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#), in April.

In June, the biennial review of the [Global Counter Terrorism Strategy](#) will take place.

For the first time, the Assembly will be conducting dialogues with the candidates for the position of President of the General Assembly for the 73rd session.

Wrapping up his remarks, Mr. Lajčák warned that “multilateralism is under threat” because the very purpose of the United Nations is being questioned not by one actor but by many.

Up for debate now are truths, accepted for decades, such as that we are stronger together, than apart; that all voices should be heard – not just those belonging to the most powerful; and that a compromise or agreement for all is better than a win for one, or a few, he said.

“We all have a responsibility to push back, against this trend,” he urged.

[South Africa responding to largest-ever Listeria outbreak – UN health agency](#)

12 January 2018 – What is believed to be the largest-ever outbreak of the bacterial disease Listeriosis – or Listeria – has left more than 60 people dead across South Africa, with nearly 750 confirmed cases, the United Nation’s health agency said Friday.

Listeriosis is a serious, but [preventable and treatable disease](#) caused by the bacterium, *Listeria monocytogenes*, which is found in soil, water, vegetation and some animal faeces. Animal products, including meat and dairy; seafood; and fresh produce, such as fruits and vegetables, can all be contaminated.

“Infants are often a high target of this bacteria,” said Christian Lindmeier, spokesperson for the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), adding that “newborns are about 40 per cent of the infected people.”

Having a three-week incubation period makes it difficult to establish the source and thus, tough to prevent.

“You wouldn’t know what you ate three weeks ago – maybe the one particular food that made you sick three or four weeks later – this is the big challenge we face in this situation,” the spokesperson elaborated.

South Africans are called upon to practice WHO’s ‘Five Keys to Safer Food’ programme that include washing hands before and often during food preparation; separating raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods; and cooking foods thoroughly, especially meat, poultry, eggs and seafood.

Mr. Lindmeier underscored the importance for those with weakened immune systems – including the elderly and people living with HIV and cancer – and pregnant women, “who are 20 times more likely to get Listeriosis than other healthy adults,” to exercise care.

Nearly two-thirds of the reported cases have been from the Gauteng province, where Johannesburg and Pretoria are located.

“We have a total now of 748 laboratory-confirmed cases, but then again, this is difficult because many cases may not be even reported,” he said, adding that cases have been found in all socio-economic backgrounds since the outbreak was declared on 5 December.

The second largest outbreak of Listeriosis was in 2011, when the United States had a total of 147 reported cases. Prior to that, Italy had a large occurrence in 1997.

South Africa has implemented some measures to stem Listeriosis, such as making it a notifiable disease, whereby every Listeriosis-diagnosed patient must be reported.

“And that’s important because Listeriosis is such a big challenge because it is not just the health sector that is involved, it involves all sectors – the food industry, farming – and to find the source is really difficult simply because the incubation period is so long,” Mr. Lindmeier asserted.

More refugees and migrants feared lost in Mediterranean; UN urges safer resettlement options

12 January 2018 – Amid reports that some 160 people are feared lost during desperate attempts to cross the Mediterranean this week alone, the United Nations refugee agency on Friday called for more action to save lives by offering more resettlement places and safe alternatives for people on the move.

“[We] have been advocating for a comprehensive approach to address movements of migrants and refugees who embark on perilous journeys across the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean,” William Spindler, a spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), told the press at the regular news briefing in Geneva.

The approach, he outlined, should include building and strengthening protection capacity and livelihood support in countries of first asylum; providing more regular and safe ways for refugees to find safety through legal pathways; and addressing the root causes and drivers of refugee displacement.

In two separate incidents Monday and one Tuesday in the Mediterranean, about 160 people – including women and children – were reported dead or missing.

Less than five per cent resettlement places over 2018-19

In September last year, the UN refugee agency had appealed urgently for 40,000 resettlement places for refugees in 15 priority countries of asylum and transit along the Central Mediterranean route.

In all, 277,000 refugees are estimated to be in need of resettlement in these countries.

However, against these projected needs, UNHCR has to date received approximately 13,000 offers of resettlement places in 2018 and 2019.

“Most of these are part of regular established global resettlement programmes and only a few represent additional places,” added Mr. Spindler.

On its part, UNHCR has evacuated hundreds of vulnerable refugees since November, the vast majority children and women, from Libya to Niger.

“For unaccompanied children, a solution in the best interest of each child will be identified, while adults go through UNHCR regular processing with a view to identifying solutions for them, including resettlement,” said the UNHCR spokesperson.

Iraqis returning home outnumber displaced for first time since 2013, says UN migration agency

12 January 2018 – The number of Iraqis returning to their area of origin has surpassed those internally displaced for the first time since December 2013, when the country became engulfed in conflict with the Islamic State in Iraq

and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), the United Nations migration agency said Friday.

“Iraqis who remain displaced are among the most vulnerable, as they [face obstacles to return](#), including damage or destruction of their home and local infrastructure, financial limitations and other constraints,” said Gerard Waite, chief of the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) mission in Iraq.

Over the past four years, the country has been deeply affected by the conflict with Iraq’s victory over the ISIL, which led to the displacement of nearly six million people, IOM stated.

On 9 December, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced Iraq’s victory over ISIL and by the end of the year, IOM had identified 3.2 million people who had returned back to their place of origin – while a staggering 2.6 million remained displaced.

Following improved security in retaken areas, a sizable number of internally displaced people (IDPs) have returned home to mainly the three governorates worst affected by ISIL’s occupation, accounting for 86 per cent of displaced Iraqis. More than 1.2 million people returned to the governorate of Anbar; nearly 975,000 to Ninewa; and close to 460,000 to Salah al-Din.

Shortly after the operation to retake Mosul was launched in October 2016, IOM constructed two emergency displacement sites, one in Haj Ali and one in Qayara.

With a combined capacity to shelter 110,000 IDPs, these sites were constructed in partnership with Iraq’s Ministry of Migration and Displacement in the southeast of Ninewa governorate. The more than 71,000 internally displaced persons remaining there receive relief kits, medical services and psychosocial support from IOM, and other services from humanitarian partners.

IOM pointed out that 57 per cent of IDPs are currently in Ninewa, which has an intra-governorate IDP people population of 97 per cent.

Intra-governorate returns account for 55 per cent of returnees, a common trend across the most-affected governorates that is likely to continue.

[UN rights office urges Tunisian authorities to ensure freedom of peaceful assembly](#)

12 January 2018 – The United Nations human rights office on Friday called on

the authorities in Tunisia to ensure that protestors are not arrested in an arbitrary manner, and that all those detained are treated with full respect for their due process rights and other fundamental guarantees.

“We are closely [watching the demonstrations](#) across Tunisia and the authorities’ response to them,” Rupert Colville, spokesperson of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), told reporters in Geneva, Switzerland, expressing concern about the high number of arrests – 778 people since Monday, some 200 of them between the ages of 15 and 20.

“The authorities must ensure that those exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are not prevented from doing so,” he stressed.

Ahead of the 14 January anniversary of the 2011 revolution, it is particularly important to ensure that demonstrators are able to protest peacefully.

Those taking to the streets should exercise restraint and calm, Mr. Colville said. There has been looting, vandalism and violence, including damage to police stations and shops but peaceful demonstrators must not be held responsible or penalised for the violent acts of others, he added.

The UN human rights office urges all sides to work together towards resolving, with full respect for human rights, the economic and social problems underpinning the unrest, he said.