

After 'successful' visit to Haiti, Security Council notes window of opportunity for reforms

30 June 2017 – Haiti has a window of opportunity to implement reforms necessary to bring the Caribbean country onto a path of stability and development, the United Nations Security Council President said today.

Recounting the Council's recent visit to Haiti, Ambassador Sacha Sergio Llorentty Soliz of Bolivia, which holds the presidency for the month of June, pointed to opportunities to cement positive change in the country.

"Haiti is at a [political crossroads](#). The window of opportunity is open to promote the reforms the country needs to respond to challenges," he said. These include strengthening the rule of law, reforming the security sector, providing basic services, and creating jobs.

Mr. Llorentty led the Security Council mission to Haiti from 22 to 24 June, to get a first-hand look at how the UN could best contribute to stability and development in the country.

"The mission of the Security Council to Haiti was successful because of the large amount of information we obtained in face-to-face meetings, and the better understanding of concerns and expectations that Haitians have about the drawdown of MINUSTAH and the transition to the new mission," Mr. Llorentty said, using the acronym for the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti.

In April, the Council extended MINUSTAH's mandate for a final six months, deciding to transition it into a smaller follow-up mission, known as the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), which would assist the Haitian Government to strengthen rule-of-law institutions, its security sector and human rights monitoring.

"The information gathered will be useful when defining the nature of implementation of the new mission," said Mr. Llorentty.

During the visit, the Council members met with President Jovenel Moïse, members of his cabinet, parliamentarians, national police, judicial officials and civil society and private sector representatives.

The main issue which came up at every meeting, and which requires the Council's attention, Mr. Llorentty said, was cholera. Concerns over cholera were vital to all aspects of Haiti's future, from water and sanitation concerns to its development and stability, he noted.

In December 2016, then-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon put forth a New Approach to Cholera in Haiti, which demonstrated the Organization's commitment to eliminating the disease in the country.

Colombia: With arms laid down, focus now on reintegration, UN envoy tells Security Council

30 June 2017 – Highlighting progress in the Colombian peace process, especially the completion of the laying down of arms by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), the United Nations envoy for the country has called for shifting the momentum to other aspects of the historic peace deal.

In his briefing to the UN Security Council today, Jean Arnault, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Colombia, recalled the conviction expressed by President Juan Manuel Santos and Timoleon Jimenez, the head of the FARC-EP Secretariat, at a ceremony for the final laying down of weapons – that the half-century-long armed conflict was over.

“I cannot but quote President Santos when he said that ‘reaching that day, living that day had made it worthwhile to be President of Colombia’,” said Mr. Arnault.

Attention should now shift to other aspects of the peace agreement, including the reintegration of FARC-EP combatants and militias, “among whom a deep sense of uncertainty prevails as to their physical security following disarmament and their socio-economic future,” he noted.

“No effort can be spared in the prompt implementation of that agenda,” he added.

He also highlighted that in addition to the reintegration of combatants, the peace process must also respond to the needs and expectations of the more vulnerable sectors of Colombian society and recalled the priority areas identified by the Colombian Government: rule of law and increased security; providing access to goods and services to areas that did not have access to it; and prompt delivery of justice to victims of the conflict.

“We welcome the fact that together with reintegration these were precisely the priorities indicated by the Government to the [UN] Peacebuilding Fund, and we call upon the international community to support the achievement of these goals,” said Mr. Arnault.

In this context, Mr. Arnault, who is also the head of the UN Mission in Colombia, expressed that it was an honour to be requested by the Government and the FARC-EP to establish a second verification mission focused on reintegration and wider security guarantees, and to begin as soon as possible.

“Like the first mission, the second one will be as much about fostering cooperation and building confidence as it will be about verification as such,” he said, noting that the Mission believes that the trust that has been established between it, the two parties, state institutions and civil society can be brought to bear on the success of the second mandate.

The UN envoy also informed the Council of the impact of the Tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism as an effective tool to maintain and strengthen confidence between the parties.

“Its presence at the local level will help ensure that incidents that may occur in the coming weeks and months can continue to be dealt with cooperatively.”

As to the steps after the laying down of arms, Mr. Arnault also informed the Council that the UN Mission and the FARC-EP, with the support of the armed forces and the police, will now focus on the disposal of hundreds of arms caches, the collection of weapons in them, and the destruction of explosives and unstable armament.

“The disposal of arms caches is undoubtedly a difficult process, but we are encouraged by the willingness of FARC-EP and the armed forces to move forward, and we are confident that if not all, at least a high percentage of the caches can be dealt with [within set timeframes],” he stated.

[Venezuela bans Attorney General from leaving country; UN rights office voices concern](#)

30 June 2017 – Amid the ongoing violence in Venezuela, the United Nations human rights office today expressed concern about a decision by the Supreme Court to null the appointment of the Attorney General, freeze her assets and ban her from leaving the country.

“We are [concerned](#) that the Supreme Court’s decisions appear to seek to strip her Office of its mandate and responsibilities as enshrined in the Venezuelan Constitution, and undermine the Office’s independence,” said Rupert Colville, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), addressing journalists in Geneva.

The Venezuelan Supreme Court on 28 June decided to begin removal proceedings against Attorney General Luisa Ortega, freeze her assets and ban her from leaving the country. It also transferred some of the Attorney General’s, until now, exclusive functions to the Ombudsperson.

Mr. Colville said that the dismissal of judicial officials should be subject to strict criteria “that do not undermine the independent and impartial performance of their functions.”

UN Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors stipulate that governments should ensure that prosecutors can do their jobs without intimidation, harassment or improper interference, among other things.

OHCHR noted that since March, the Attorney General has taken “important steps to defend human rights, documenting deaths during the wave of demonstrations, insisting on the need for due process and the importance of the separation of powers, and calling for people who have been arbitrarily detained to be immediately released.”

According to the Attorney General’s Office, 75 have been killed and some 1,419 injured so far in the two months of protests.

Mr. Colville urged “all powers of the Venezuelan State to respect the Constitution and the rule of law,” and called on the Government to ensure that the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of opinion and expression are guaranteed.

“We also call on all people in Venezuela to only use peaceful means to make themselves heard and urge all parties to renounce violence and harassment of opponents,” he continued.

[Iraq: UN warns against ‘collective punishment’ of population with alleged ISIL ties](#)

30 June 2017 – The United Nations human rights office has expressed concern over forced evictions of people alleged to have ties with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) terrorist group, noting that such actions may amount to collective punishment that is in clear contravention of the Iraqi Constitution as well as human rights and humanitarian law.

“As Mosul is increasingly liberated from ISIL, we are seeing an alarming rise in threats, specifically of forced evictions, against those suspected of being ISIL members or whose relatives are alleged to be involved with ISIL – threats that have also been made in other areas,” [said](#) Rupert Colville, spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), at today’s press briefing in Geneva.

Fighting in Mosul is becoming ever more intense and concentrated as Iraqi national security forces, supported by the international coalition, push to

retake the whole of the city from ISIL.

“We are extremely concerned at the situation of civilians in Mosul,” Mr. Colville said, reminding all parties to the conflict of their obligation to distinguish between civilians and combatants in armed conflict.

He said that OHCHR received reports of “night letters” left at families’ houses or distributed in neighbourhoods, including in Sharqat in Salahadin Governorate, Al Heet City in Al Anbar and Al-Qayyarah in Ninewa, as well as in Mosul City.

These letters typically warn people to leave by a particular date or face forced expulsion. Many of these threats are the result of tribal agreements that explicitly demand that families of ISIL-affiliated members be excluded from the area.

“People are at real risk of forced eviction from their homes and losing access to basic necessities, including adequate housing, food, access to health services and education,” Mr. Colville said, urging the Iraqi Government to take action to halt such imminent evictions or any type of collective punishment.

“Illegal forced evictions are acts of vengeance that are detrimental to national reconciliation and social cohesion,” he added.

On Thursday, Peter Hawkins, the representative of the UN Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) in Iraq, called for the protection of children trapped in the Old City neighbourhood of western Mosul.

“Children are facing multiple threats to their lives. Those stranded in the fighting are hiding in their basements, fearful of the next onslaught. Those who try to flee, risk being shot or wounded,” he [said](#) in a statement.

“The plight of these children and their survival must remain a top priority now and in the weeks and months to come,” he added.

Challenges abound as ‘significant’ numbers of displaced return within Syria, warns UNHCR

30 June 2017 – Citing “significant” returns of displaced persons to and within Syria, the United Nations refugee agency said today that while it will be scaling up its response to assist those coming back, it can neither promote nor facilitate returns given the security and humanitarian situation in the war-torn country.

According to estimates, more than 440,000 internally displaced people have returned to their homes during the first six months of this year. During the same period, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) has recorded over 31,000 Syrian refugees returning from neighbouring countries.

Seeking out family members, checking on property, and, in some cases, a real or perceived improvement in security conditions in parts of the country were the primary factors influencing those who decided to return, Andrej Mahecic, a spokesperson for the UN agency, told reporters in Geneva.

“While there is overall increased hope linked to the recent Astana and Geneva peace talks, [we] believe [conditions for refugees to return in safety and dignity are not yet in place in Syria](#),” he said, voicing concern over the sustainability of security improvements as well as significant protection risks in many return areas.

“At this stage, and while UNHCR will be investing to help, with other partners, to improve conditions in accessible areas inside Syria, refugee returns from host countries can neither be promoted nor facilitated by UNHCR at this stage,” he added.

RELATED: [Delays in access in Syria ‘will mean further death,’ warns top UN relief official](#)

In particular, access to displaced populations inside Syria remains a key challenge, noted Mr. Mahecic, highlighting that aid convoys are still unable to access regularly those areas that have become newly accessible.

Other challenges include limited livelihood opportunities, shortages of food and water, and sporadic or non-existent health, education, social and other basic services. Many of Syria’s schools have been damaged or destroyed and offer no possibility for education.

In the midst of this complex situation, UNHCR is pursuing a number of preparatory steps, in anticipation of the time when conditions for voluntary repatriation of refugees in conditions of safety and dignity are in place. However, resources remain a major constraint, hindering its efforts.

Of the \$304 million appeal for its operations to assist the displaced inside Syria in 2017, only \$103 million (about 33 per cent) has been received by UNHCR.

It is also seeking an additional \$150 million in 2017 to ramp up its delivery inside Syria to support both the displaced, returnees and other vulnerable people, and to help improve conditions in potential return areas.

The Syrian conflict, now into its seventh year, has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands, displaced some 6.3 million within the country and forced 5.1 million to flee outside its borders. Also, more than 13.5 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, including nearly 4.5 million in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.