

On first visit to Somalia since elections, UN political chief lauds progress

25 August 2017 – The head of the United Nations political office visited Somalia this week, where he praised the “real forward momentum” in the country’s political development, and reiterated UN support as the Horn of Africa country tackles its challenges, such as the fight against the group Al Shabaab.

“I am here to reinforce and to demonstrate the support that the UN has for the people and the Government of Somalia as the country addresses a number of challenges ranging from the drought to security, to the political agenda going forward,” [said](#) UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman.

In a series of meetings on Thursday in the capital, Mogadishu, Mr. Feltman spoke with President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, and Prime Minister Hassan Kheyre, among others, about the progress made in Somalia in recent months.

“I sense a real forward momentum in terms of political developments, in terms of reforms and transparency and of things moving forward to one-person one-vote electoral system for the 2021 parliamentary elections,” the senior UN official said.

Mr. Feltman praised the work of the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC), which was created earlier this year and which is putting structures in place for the next parliamentary and presidential elections.

Following a meeting with NIEC Chairperson Halima Ibrahim, Mr. Feltman urged the Commission to move forward on the country’s constitutional review process, which will lay the foundation for the national elections.

Among other topics discussed during the visit was the need for additional international support to combat the drought affecting more than 6.2 million people in Somalia.

The visit is Mr. Feltman’s first since President Farmaajo was elected in February.

That poll was a “milestone” for the Horn of Africa nation as it moves forward after decades of war, said at the time Michael Keating, Special Representative and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia ([UNSOM](#)). Mr. Keating accompanied Mr. Feltman during Thursday’s meetings.

AUDIO: Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman urges Somalia to continue efforts towards reconciliation and state-building. Credit: UN News

Climate change threatens agricultural trade in Pacific Rim economies, UN agency warns

25 August 2017 – With global warming expected to significantly impact future yields in countries located closer to the equator, the United Nations agriculture agency is calling on Asia-Pacific economies to take a leading role in adaptation and mitigation.

“Many APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation] economies have already felt the full force of agricultural losses from natural disasters in recent years, with the vast majority of these being climate related,” said Kundhavi Kadiresan, Assistant Director-General and FAO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific.

Geographically, the negative impact of climate change on agricultural output could result in lower yields of rice, wheat, corn and soybeans in countries with tropical climates, compared with the impacts experienced by those in higher latitudes. Fisheries could also be affected by changes to water temperature, warned the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) today.

“The annual tally runs into the billions and billions of dollars in losses. So, the time to act is now. Policy makers need to prepare for changes in supply, shifting trade patterns and a need for greater investment in agriculture, fisheries, land and water management, that will benefit smallholder farmers and others that produce our food,” Mr. Kadiresan added.

It is imperative that we start thinking now about the hard decisions and actions that the [Asia Pacific] economies, and others, will need to take

FAO Regional Representative Kundhavi Kadiresan

Many vital agricultural regions in Asia are at risk of crossing key climate thresholds that would cause plant and animal productivity to decline, according to a meeting in Viet Nam of Agriculture Ministers of APEC member economies.

Based on the findings of the global research community, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) anticipates that these trends are expected to worsen in the future with the projected impacts of anthropogenic climate change.

Much can be done to increase the efficiency of agriculture and land-use activities in Asia, according to Mr. Kadiresan.

A changing environment

The agriculture sectors account for at least one-fifth of total emissions, mainly from forest to farmland conversions; livestock and paddy production; and application of synthetic fertilizers. Estimates show that 70 per cent of the technical potential to reduce agriculture emissions occurs in tropical developing countries, which characterize much of Asia.

It is imperative that we start thinking now about the hard decisions and actions that the APEC economies, and others, will need to take. Governments will need to consider greater social protection measures. Industry and trade will need to adapt to shifting supply and demand. There is no quick fix but there is every reason to act," Mr. Kadiresan stressed.

FAO has been working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Viet Nam to assess potential emission reductions the System of Rice Intensification and improved livestock management.

In Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and Mongolia, FAO, has partnered in developing programmes to measure, monitor and report emissions and adaptation actions in the agriculture and land-use sectors.

In the forestry sector, avoiding deforestation, increasing the area under forest, and adopting sustainable forest management will create invaluable carbon sinks. FAO has been supporting national programmes for reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

The meeting made clear that more upfront support is essential to increase farmers' productivity, build capacity to adapt to climate change and reduce the emissions related to production.

A second area requiring financing is also needed to support capacity-building of appropriate institutions and policies. Climate funds could become an important catalyst for climate change adaptation and mitigation if they are used to build the enabling environment essential for climate-smart agricultural development, while ensuring that public agricultural investment is also climate-smart, and to leverage private finance.

PODCAST: Uganda's 'open door' policy tested amid crush of desperate South Sudanese refugees

25 August 2017 – South Sudan, Africa's newest nation, has known no respite since fighting broke out last July, following the collapse of a peace deal between Government and opposition forces, sparking what United Nations

agencies report as incidents of [barbaric violence](#) carried out by armed groups, and a massive spike in the number of desperate people fleeing for safety.

Amid the ongoing violence, wide-scale sexual assault of women and girls, and the kidnapping of boys for forced conscription, South Sudan, while generally off the media radar, has become Africa's largest refugee crisis and the world's third largest, after Syria and Afghanistan.

The UN estimates that close to 2,000 people a day are crossing the South Sudan border into northern Uganda's Arua district and the number of South Sudanese refugees in the country has now passed the one million mark.

The majority are women and children who arrive exhausted and hungry, with little more than the clothes on their backs. Some of them even have their first meal at the Imvepi reception centre, after walking for days to reach safety.

Struggling to cope with the growing influx, Uganda, which has an open-door policy with respect to refugees, has finally reached [breaking point](#), according to the UN refugee agency.

For [this edition](#) of the *UN News* podcast series, 'The Lid Is On,' Jocelyne Sambira is on the ground in northern Uganda to meet some of the refugees, and listen to their stories of survival. She also looks into Uganda's innovative approach to integrating refugees into society and how this is impacting local communities.

AUDIO: THE LID IS ON – Mass influx of South Sudanese refugees threatening Uganda's open door policy. Credit: UN News

[UN rights office gathering info on air strikes in Yemen; urges protection of civilians](#)

25 August 2017 – Reiterating that attacks targeting civilians are prohibited under international law, the United Nations human rights office today confirmed dozens of casualties in airstrikes on villages near the capital, Sana'a.

Briefing journalists in Geneva, a spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), Liz Throssell, said one of the airstrikes on 23 August hit the Istirahat Al Shahab hotel in Bayt Al Athri in Arhab district, destroying the second floor and seriously damaging the rest

of the building.

“So far we have been able to confirm that 33 civilians were killed and another 25 injured in the attack,” Ms. Throssell said of the attack, which is being blamed on Coalition Forces.

OHCHR said the attack came moments after an airstrike on a nearby security checkpoint manned by the Houthis. There were no reported casualties in that earlier attack.

Also on 23 August, an airstrike by Coalition Forces hit a house near a Houthi security checkpoint in a neighbouring district, killing six civilians and injuring at least 13 others.

“In all these cases, in which civilians were killed and injured, witnesses said that there had been no warnings that an attack was imminent,” Ms. Throssell said.

Speaking on behalf of OHCHR, the spokesperson said attacks targeting civilians or civilian objects are prohibited under international humanitarian law, which also prohibits indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks.

“We remind all parties to the conflict, including the Coalition, of their duty to ensure full respect for international humanitarian law,” said Ms. Throssell.

OHCHR is urging the relevant authorities to probe the attacks in “credible, comprehensive and impartial” investigations.

In the past week, 58 civilians were killed in attacks by the Saudi-led Coalition and affiliates of the Houthis.

“This week’s total is more than the number of civilians killed in the whole of June, when 52 were killed and in July, which saw 57 civilian deaths,” the spokesperson said.

No ‘worse place on earth’ than Syria’s Raqqa, says senior UN adviser urging pause in fighting

24 August 2017 – A senior United Nations aid official today urged the international community to do whatever is needed to allow citizens to flee from Raqqa, describing the de facto capital of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), the “worse place on earth.”

Briefing journalists in Geneva, UN Special Adviser Jan Egeland said the five

neighbourhoods held by ISIL in Raqqa are heavily shelled from the surrounding and encircling forces, and under constant air raids by the Coalition.

“Now is the time to think of possibilities, pauses or otherwise that might facilitate the escape of civilians, knowing that Islamic State fighters are doing their absolute best to use them as human shields,” Mr. Egeland [said](#). “I cannot think of a worse place on earth now than in these five neighborhoods and for these 20,000 people.”

He urged members from the Humanitarian Task Force, including the members of the Coalition that is supporting the retake of Raqqa, to “do whatever is possible to make it possible for the people to escape.”

The International Syria Support Group (ISSG) established the respective taskforces on humanitarian aid delivery and a wider ceasefire. They have been meeting separately since early 2016 on a way forward in the crisis. Russia and the United States are the co-chairs of the taskforces and the ISSG, which also comprises the UN, the Arab League, the European Union and 16 other countries.

Mr. Egeland went on to note that the difference between the situation in Raqqa and that in Aleppo or other besieged areas was that that UN had contact with those holding those neighbourhoods.

“There is not a two-way communication, and there seems to be a very deliberate policy of holding people, and using them as human shields. But this is the time to try anything to allow their safe escape,” he said, adding that few people are leaving now out of fear of death.

More than 260,000 people from the northern Iraqi city escaped and are receiving aid from 50 concentration points. Inside the city, however, conditions are “very bleak” and “it is very hard to assist.”

The senior UN official also noted the situation in Deir ez-Zor, the town where forces are encircling, and which is believed to be home to some 90,000 people.

“Extreme caution now also there has to be exercised, not to make it in anyway worse, for the civilian population,” he said.

Among other locations mentioned in his briefing, Mr. Egeland said it was “heart-breaking” that aid was not allowed in to Fou and Kefraya, as well as Yarmouk, the Palestinian camp near Damascus, as had been agreed, after parties changed their minds.

Earlier in the briefing, UN Deputy Special Envoy for Syria Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy reiterated Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura’s support and appreciation for the international humanitarian task force, and countries who have worked with the parties to the conflict to allow in aid.

Mr. de Mistura is expected to brief the Security Council on political developments in relations to Syria on Wednesday, 30 August.