

## Yemen: UN envoy raises concern over attack on his convoy during visit to Sana'a

24 May 2017 – The United Nations envoy for conflict-torn Yemen today expressed deep concern over the attack on his convoy while traveling from the airport to the UN compound on Monday.

“It is the responsibility of the local authorities to ensure the safety of all UN personnel in the country and urged them to investigate the incident, hold those responsible to account, and prevent any such incidents in the future,” said Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, according to a [note](#) issued by the Office of the Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General.

Concluding a three-day visit to the country’s capital, Sana’a, the Special Envoy indicated that the incident increased his determination to continue with his efforts to find a negotiated political settlement that serves the best interests of the Yemeni people.

Prior to Sana’a, he visited Saudi Arabia and Qatar, where he met with government officials as part of his efforts to find a political solution to the conflict in Yemen.

In Sana’a, he met with political leaders from Ansar’Allah and the General People’s Congress and Representatives of other political parties, the note said, adding that the talks focused on possible agreements which would prevent the spread of military activities to Hudeidah and practical ways to ensure the resumption of salaries to all Yemeni civil servants nationwide.

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed also met with members of the Yemeni Women’s Pact for Peace and Security and representatives of civil society organizations to discuss current political challenges and security concerns in addition to the economic crisis and recent outbreak of cholera, the note said.

In a meeting with Yemeni youth, the Special Envoy discussed mechanisms for greater youth contribution to international efforts to reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict, in addition to possible solutions to reopen Sana’a International Airport and prevent further deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation.

He also met with senior World Bank officials in order to support the World Bank-UN collaboration to address the growing food insecurity and economic crisis in Yemen, the note added.

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# Preserving cultural heritage, diversity vital for peacebuilding in Middle East – UNESCO chief

24 May 2017 – Protecting cultural diversity is vital for peacebuilding in the Middle East, the head of the United Nations cultural agency said today, pledging solidarity with the victims of ethnic and religious violence in the region, and highlighting the need for both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power.

Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), [made this call](#) at the Madrid Conference, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain. The conference is a follow up to a [open debate](#) in the UN Security Council and the [Paris Conference](#) on the victims of ethnic and religious violence in the Middle East.

Citing the ongoing cultural destruction and the dramatic situation of persons belonging to communities targeted and threatened for ethnic or religious reasons in the Middle East, the UNESCO chief said: “Violent extremists target both heritage and human lives – they target victims and minorities from all backgrounds, Shebak, Turkmen, Yezidis, Muslims, Christians..., as symbols of the pluralism they abhor.”

“Violent extremists target schools, because they know the power of knowledge to counter their rhetoric drawing on false visions of faith and history, they destroy culture, because they know it can foster dialogue and help people live together in their diversity,” she added.

RELATED: [World needs ‘soft power’ of education, culture, sciences, to combat ‘ancient hatreds’– UNESCO chief](#)

The aim of the Madrid Conference is to examine actions taken and determine most urgent priorities, as well as identifying programmes, projects and actions to enable displaced populations to return and to foster reconciliation and stabilization.

Also attending the event was Spain’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alfonso Maria Dastis Quecedo, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan, Ayman H. Safadi and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Ibrahim Al-Jaafari.

At the conference, Ms. Bokova also highlighted the role of the international community in tackling the complex issue. “We need ‘hard power’ to respond, we need ‘soft power’ to prevent, through education, culture and information,” she said. “This is the role of UNESCO and the goal of the United Nations, its Counter-Terrorism Strategy in support of Member States.”

The Director-General went on to note the importance of teaching peace and providing people with the skills to overcome mistrust and division, and to

build dialogue. This underpins all of UNESCO's action to prevent violent extremism through emergency education and the protection of heritage.

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## [UN rights chief concerned about health of Palestinian hunger strikers in Israel jails](#)

24 May 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today expressed serious concern about the health of more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons as their hunger strike entered its 38th day without resolution.

“I am especially alarmed by reports of punitive measures by the Israeli authorities against the hunger strikers, including restricted access to lawyers and the denial of family visits,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein [said](#) in a news release from his Office ([OHCHR](#)).

“The right of detainees to access a lawyer is a fundamental protection in international human rights law that should never be curtailed,” he added.

The Palestinian prisoners began a hunger strike on 17 April, demanding, amongst other things, an end to administrative detention and solitary confinement. They are also demanding an increase in the number and length of family visits and improved access to healthcare.

“Various international bodies have repeatedly called on Israel to end its practice of administrative detention,” Mr. Zeid said, noting that such detainees should either be charged with an offence and tried, according to international standards, or released immediately.

An estimated 6,300 Palestinians are currently being held in Israeli prisons, mostly outside the occupied Palestinian territory, in contravention of article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

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## [‘All roads should lead to universal healthcare,’ says new WHO chief](#)

24 May 2017 – The newly-elected head of the United Nations World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, outlined his priorities for journalists at the agency's headquarters today in Geneva, where he

stressed the need for Member States to provide healthcare for all and to implement international health regulations.

Looking at the work ahead, [Dr. Tedros](#) stressed that the original reason the UN health agency was set up nearly 70 years ago remains true today: providing healthcare for all.

“All roads should lead to universal health coverage,” he underscored, and this mantra should be the WHO’s “centre of gravity.”

“What the world promised when WHO was instituted in 1948 – health for all – is true today, but half of our population still does not have access to healthcare, universal health coverage [...] I think it’s time to walk our talk. The whole world is asking for that [...] health as a rights issue, an end in itself.”

Another key WHO mission is managing global health emergencies, Dr. Tedros said, pointing to changes put in place by his predecessor Dr. Margaret Chan, that had led to the swift detection of the [current Ebola outbreak](#) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

But more reforms need to be made, the new WHO head insisted, suggesting the need for governments to fast-track internationally agreed regulations to deal with epidemics better in future.

He said that another major issue was regaining confidence in Member States and ensuring the best use of their contributions.

Dr. Tedros, of Ethiopia, will begin his five-year term on 1 July 2017, WHO said in a statement following his election yesterday.

Among his previous positions, Dr. Tedros was Ethiopia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and, prior, Minister of Health.

He also served as Chair of the Global Fund and of the Roll Back Malaria (RBM) Partnership Board (RBM), where he secured “record funding” for the two organizations and created the Global Malaria Action Plan, which expanded RBM’s reach beyond Africa to Asia and Latin America, according to the UN agency.

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## [Top UN official in South Sudan urges Security Council to advance ‘common strategy’ on political process](#)

24 May 2017 – The head of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in South

Sudan today urged the Security Council to unite behind a common strategy for advancing the political process and peace in the crisis-torn country.

Addressing the Council in New York via video link, David Shearer, the Secretary-General's Special Representative in South Sudan and the head of the Mission, known as UNMISS, said that "unity of purpose will [send the best signal](#) to South Sudan's political leaders to focus first and foremost on the plight of their citizens."

He also called for a "coherent and unified regional position" to aid political developments in the country, noting that Governments in the region hold "significant influence" on political developments to end the three-year war but are not communicating the same message.

Today's briefing comes as President Salva Kiir again declared a unilateral ceasefire from Juba and pledged to review the cases of political prisoners.

Mr. Shearer said these announcements are "very welcome" but "the proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating." He noted that there will be close scrutiny on the number of prisoners released and whether the ceasefire monitoring group can perform its work.

The senior UN official also noted that President Kiir formally launched a National Dialogue this week meant to end the conflict begun in December 2013, but has excluded his political rival and former deputy, Riek Machar.