

## UN and regional partners urge DR Congo parties to resume political talks

16 February 2017 – Increasingly concerned about the political impasse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the United Nations and regional partner organizations today urged political actors to work out how to implement the 31 December political agreement on a timeframe for elections.

The UN, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the International Organization of La Francophonie (IOF) today released a joint statement warning that the situation “has the potential to undermine the political goodwill” that led to the signing of the agreement in December.

“The four partner organizations note that six weeks after agreeing on the modalities of a transition period leading to the holding of peaceful and credible elections by December 2017, the parties are yet to conclude discussions on the effective implementation of the agreement,” according to the statement.

The agreement – facilitated by Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo (CENCO) mediators, and reached in DRC’s capital, Kinshasa, on 31 December 2016 – would result in new elections being held in the country before the end of the year and for President Joseph Kabila to step down.

In today’s statement, the four partner organizations reaffirm the need for all parties to rally behind the mediation efforts by CENCO, and urge all stakeholders “to redouble, in good faith” their efforts to conclude the ongoing talks.

A lack of implementation plans threaten to shake the “legitimacy of the transitional institutions until elections,” the partners said.

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## Path to Middle East peace ‘riddled with hazards,’ UN envoy tells Security Council

16 February 2017 – Extremism, bloodshed and displacement continue to plague the Middle East, a senior United Nations envoy told the Security Council today, warning that these phenomena are feeding intolerance, violence, and religious radicalism far beyond the region.

“It is critical that we all understand that we must never allow the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict to drift into the abyss of the extremism and radicalism sweeping the region," said Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, briefing the Security Council.

"Palestinians, Israelis and the international community have a duty to act responsibly, avoid escalating tensions, refrain from unilateral actions and work together to uphold peace," he added.

He also drew attention of the Council members to the recently adopted so called "Regularisation Law" which has the potential to retroactively regularise thousands of existing settlement units built on land owned by Palestinian individuals living under occupation, as well as dozens of illegal outposts.

Noting that the "Regularisation Law" is in contravention of international law and that according to the Israeli Attorney General it is also unconstitutional, Mr. Mladenov told the Council that the Supreme Court is expected to rule on its constitutionality soon.

"If the Law stays in place, it will have far-reaching consequences for Israel, while seriously undermining prospects for the two-state solution and for Arab-Israeli peace," he cautioned.

RELATED: Israeli legislation on settlements violates international law, says UN chief Guterres

Also in his briefing, the UN envoy expressed concern over daily violence and so-called "lone wolf" attacks against Israeli civilians. In one such recent incident, six Israelis were injured in a shooting and stabbing attack by an 18-year-old Palestinian from Nablus (a city in northern West Bank).

He further told the Security Council members that the volatile situation in Gaza continued to exacerbate humanitarian and development challenges, related in large part to the crippling closures of the Strip and the continuing political divide.

"This winter has borne witness to a serious electricity crisis which in December left Palestinians in Gaza with only two hours of electricity per day," he said, informing them of UN's work to address the electricity challenges in a sustainable manner.

The two-state solution remains the only way to achieve the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples

He also spoke of the situation in the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) areas of operations, noting that the ceasefire between Israel and Syria (under UNDOF area of operations) is holding, albeit in a volatile security environment.

Concluding his briefing, the UN envoy recalled that the Middle East Quartet Report and Security Council resolutions clearly outlined what is required to

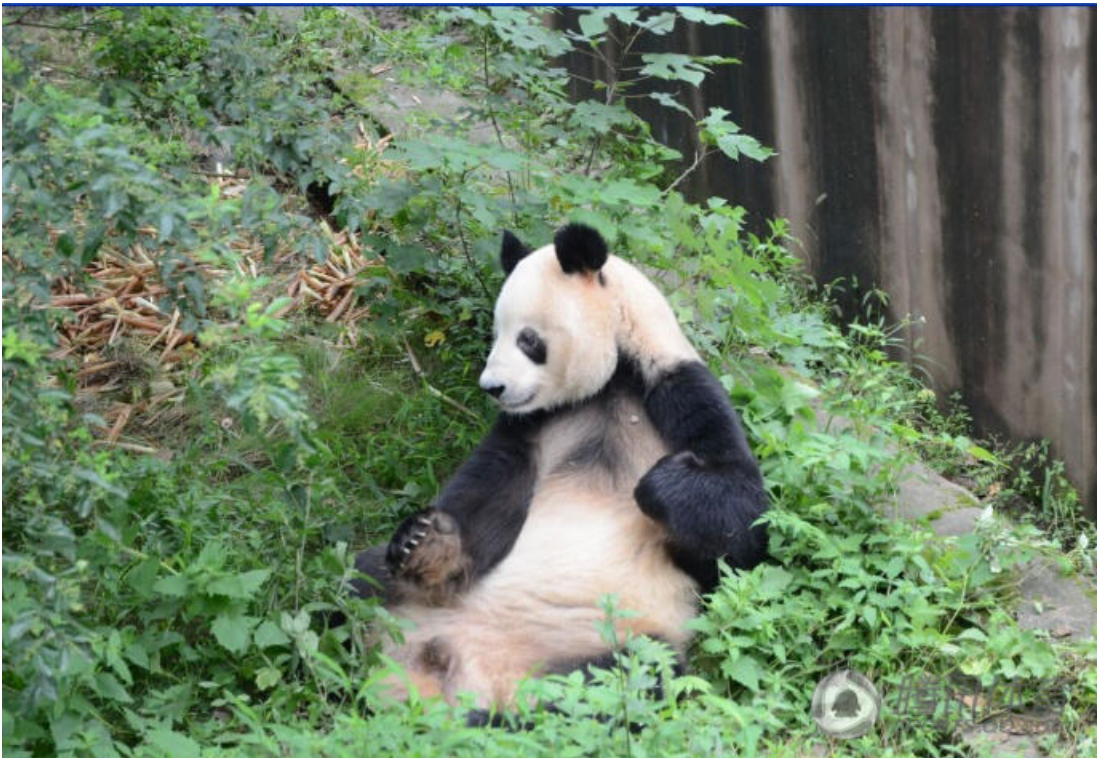
advance a sustainable and just peace in the region.

“The two-state solution remains the only way to achieve the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples,” he said, noting that Israel can take the necessary step to stop settlement expansion and construction in order to preserve this prospect, while the Palestinian leadership can demonstrate their commitment to tackling the challenges of violence and incitement on their side.

“This will create an environment that will facilitate bilateral final status negotiations that the international community can support,” he added.

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## [Olympic panda Cobi dies at age 25](#)



File photo of Cobi, a giant panda named after the mascot of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games. [Photo: qq.com]

Cobi, a giant panda named after the mascot of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, died this month at the age of 25 at a zoo in Chengdu, capital of southwest China's Sichuan Province.

Cobi passed away on Feb. 2, despite two days' of emergency treatment after he suddenly fell into a coma on Jan. 31, the Chengdu Zoo announced Thursday.

The age of the male giant panda is equivalent to about 75 human years. He was healthy before his sudden illness though he had some symptoms of aging such as loss of appetite.

Cobi was named by Juan Antonio Samaranch, former president of the International Olympic Committee. He was born on July 26, 1992 Beijing time, coinciding with the opening day of the 25th Olympic Games in Spain.

He fathered nine cubs, most of whom have further descendants.

The average lifespan of wild pandas is 15 years, but those in captivity usually live longer due to better nutrition and living conditions.

A survey found China with an estimated 1,864 wild pandas and 375 in captivity in 2013.

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## [South Sudan: UN depllores lack of information on 20,000 people displaced in Upper Nile](#)

16 February 2017 – The top United Nations peacekeeping official in South Sudan has described the lack of information about the situation of some 20,000 internally displaced people on the west bank of the Nile in the country's north, as a "real problem."

"We want to find out what has happened to those people, and provide them with assistance if they need it," said David Shearer, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), who was making his first field trip to the town of Malakal after taking up his position as Mission chief four weeks ago.

According to a press statement issued today by the office of the Mission's spokesperson, UNMISS believes that the 20,000 people have fled towards Kodok from Wau Shilluk, a town eight miles north of the UN base in Malakal on the west bank of the River Nile.

Fighting between the Government Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces and opposition forces has expanded geographically across the west bank over the past week, and shows no signs of abating, forcing more people to flee their homes.

On Thursday, UN peacekeepers attempted to carry out a foot patrol to Wau Shilluk, but were prevented from doing so by SPLA soldiers located at Wau Shilluk, a situation Mr. Shearer described as "very frustrating."

Meanwhile, the statement noted that UNMISS has described government relocations by air of internally displaced people through Juba into Malakal as unsustainable if they are not also supported with humanitarian assistance on arrival.

The Shilluk population of Malakal has abandoned the town and 33,000 people are currently taking refuge in the camp administered by UNMISS.

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## [Press release: Medway leading the way in efforts to fix the broken housing market](#)

Housing and Planning Minister Gavin Barwell visited Medway today (16 February 2017) to see how the area is leading the way with ambitious efforts to fix the broken housing market.

Following publication of the [housing white paper](#), the minister toured 3 sites across Kent and Essex, which demonstrate the diversity of the measures set out and their potential to deliver a housing market that works for everyone.

The visits reflected the 4 key aspects of the white paper – planning more homes in the right places, building the homes we need, diversifying the market and helping people now.

The minister opened a new affordable homes development in Gillingham – one of the largest council-built, energy efficient bungalow sites in the UK.

Built on the former site of Gillingham Community College, the site comprises of 32 one to two bedroom bungalows for social rent, part of a £8.5 million housing development project.

The homes have been designed with older tenants and people with mobility problems in mind, suitable for those looking to downsize as well as people who struggle in their current living accommodation. Some of the properties are fully accessible for wheelchair users.

The minister also saw first-hand a new housing development at Kitchener Barracks, one of the largest new developments of carbon-zero homes in the country, awarded £14.4 million by the Homes and Communities Agency through the [Home Building Fund](#) to boost construction on the site.

Thanks to this government funding, Latis, an ambitious SME housebuilder, is delivering nearly 300 new homes as part of a flagship gated eco-community on public sector land formerly owned by the Ministry of Defence.

The development will include 94 new build homes and 101 new build apartments, as well as 72 conversion flats in the historic barracks building at the centre of the site.

Housing and Planning Minister, Gavin Barwell said:

It has been a great opportunity to visit 3 exciting developments across the South East of England today, showcasing the range and diversity of our housing ambitions as set out in our housing white paper.

From seeing a better choice of accommodation for older people in Gillingham, to the re-development of public sector land in Chatham by an ambitious SME housebuilder, and witnessing the expansion of infrastructure in Tilbury. All of these sites reflect the key priorities for this government and these developers are leading the way in efforts to fix our broken housing market and ensure this is a country that works for everyone.

Earlier in the day the minister visited the Port of Tilbury in Essex – one of the UK's top ports for construction materials – to discuss their future plans for growth in the Thames Gateway area.

Tilbury's £1 billion investment programme will see the development of the largest warehouse in the UK for Amazon UK, a new 40MW energy-from waste power station and the creation of a new 152-acre deep-water port facility.

Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) General Manager for the South East, Paul Kitson said:

I am delighted that the HCA has been able to support Latis in developing this landmark site, just 40 minutes from central London by train. This will provide much-needed homes that otherwise might not have happened, and is part of the HCA's ongoing commitment to the Medway area.

Medway Council Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Howard Doe said:

We are very proud of Centenary Gardens and we were very pleased to welcome the minister to officially open the new-build development, which is one of the largest council-built energy efficient bungalow sites in the UK.

This new development of 32 affordable homes caters especially for those who are less-mobile and some have been specially designed for wheelchair users. These council homes follow on from the success of phase one of this multi-million pound project which saw the creation of 26 homes on former garage sites.

The aim of this housing project was to offer people the chance to rent good quality, energy-efficient homes that they can afford, and it's safe to say we have achieved this.

The site at Gillingham is named Centenary Gardens to commemorate 100 years since World War One, with plans for the project given the go ahead in 2014.

Construction at Kitchener Barracks is set to commence this year with full completion expected by 2020.

Outline planning was obtained by Latis in April 2015.

The new [Home Building Fund](#) brings together our existing loan funding streams, such as the Builders Finance Fund, making the new Fund more accessible to small developers, and less bureaucratic to apply for than previous funds.