

International efforts towards Middle East peace must be matched by steps on the ground – UN envoy

24 March 2017 – Noting that international engagement on reviving the Middle East peace process over the last three months reconfirmed the consensus that the two-state solution is the only means of realizing the national aspirations of both peoples a senior United Nations official called for continued expansion of the momentum into a concrete vision to end the wider conflict.

“Shaping a credible political horizon through reviving engagement between the parties with intensified international and regional support is essential to advancing this goal,” Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, told the Security Council today.

In his briefing, the Mr. Mladenov highlighted that the recent increase in rockets fires from Gaza towards Israel was a worrying development and said that such potentially lethal provocations are unnecessary, dangerous and risk devastating escalation.

At the same, he also called on Israel to do more to improve the daily lives of the Palestinians and said that introduction of polices that increase Palestinian civil authority, support Palestinian development and preserve the prospect of a two-state solution, in line with the recommendations of the Middle East Quartet, remained essential.

He also spoke of the general situation over the past few months as well as detailed specific instances that had the potential to escalate the situation.

There had been a marked increase in statements, announcements and decisions related to construction and expansion, he continued.

Israel made two major announcements for a total of 5,500 housing units in settlements in Area C of the occupied West Bank, he said. Within three weeks, some 3,000 housing units had advanced through the planning process and more than 240 units had reached the final approval stage. Eighty per cent of the 4,000 settlement moves in the last three months were concentrated in and around major Israeli population centres close to the 1967 line, while some 20 per cent were in outlying locations deep inside the occupied West Bank.

“While the [Security Council] called upon both parties to refrain from acts of provocation, incitement, and inflammatory rhetoric, such actions continued during the reporting period,” he noted.

Turning to tangible actions that can help progress the peace process, the UN Special Coordinator underlined that it is essential that international efforts are accompanied by significant steps taken on the ground by the

parties, to create an environment conducive to peace.

“The United Nations will continue to call on and work with the parties and all interested stakeholders to find a just, sustainable and comprehensive resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions,” he concluded.

Closing session, UN Commission agrees roadmap to women’s economic empowerment

24 March 2017 – The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women today agreed on a roadmap to women’s full and equal participation in the economy as a vital step to achieving sustainable development as the body concluded its two-week session.

“This Commission has engaged strongly, comprehensively and constructively over the last two weeks in considering the most effective ways in which to bring about change for women in the world of work,” said Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, formally known as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

The outcome document, consisting of a set of agreed conclusions, highlights barriers that women face, such as unequal working conditions, women’s over-representation in the informal economy, gender stereotypes and social norms that reinforce women’s concentration in certain sectors, such as health and social sectors, and the uneven share of unpaid care work that women do.

This year’s Commission drew the attendance of 162 Member States, including 89 representatives at the Ministerial level. More than 3,900 representatives from 580 civil society organizations came to New York from 138 countries, attesting to the growing strength and unity of women’s voices around the world.

Member States expressed concern over the gender pay gap and the persistently low wages paid to women, which are often below decent living wages.

In the final agreement, they commit to the implementation of equal pay policies through social dialogue, collective bargaining, job evaluations and gender pay audits, among other measures.

“There has never been any excuse for the inequality that exists. Now we are seeing a healthy intolerance for inequality grow into firm and positive change,” said Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka.

Underlining that women's careers should not experience any disadvantage because of pregnancy and motherhood, the outcome document stresses the need to ensure that both women and men have access to paid parental leave and to promote men's usage of such allowances.

RELATED: UN launches 'Platform of Champions' calling to end global gender pay gap

For the first time, the transition of informal and domestic workers into the formal economy was a key issue of discussion for the Commission, whose members agreed on the need of promoting decent work and paid care in the public and private sectors; increasing the provision of social protection and wages that guarantee an adequate standard of living; and ensuring safe working conditions for women.

This comes as a matter of concern as many migrant women employed in the informal economy and in less skilled work are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

The Commission recognized the positive contributions of migrants and called for gender-responsive migration policies that promote migrant women's economic empowerment.

It also calls for strengthened efforts in both public and private sectors to retain women in the workforce and seek more gender balance in managerial positions.

Member States further called for an end to the practice of gender-based price differentiation, also known as the 'pink tax' – whereby goods and services intended for or marketed to women and girls cost more than similar items marketed to men and boys.

With the empowerment of indigenous women being the emerging theme of this session, the outcome document urges the full inclusion and development of indigenous women in economic life, including through the establishment of indigenous-owned businesses.

Building peace requires culture, education – message of historic UN Security Council resolution

24 March 2017 – Univocally condemning unlawful destruction and pillaging of cultural heritage such as religious sites and artefacts, the United Nations Security Council today adopted an historic resolution that is expected to strengthen protections for such heritage during armed conflicts where they

are most vulnerable.

“The deliberate destruction of heritage [...] has become a tactic of war to tear societies over the long term, in a strategy of cultural cleansing,” said Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) following the resolution’s adoption.

“This is why defending cultural heritage is more than a cultural issue, it is a security imperative, inseparable from that of defending human lives,” she added.

Today’s briefing by Ms. Bokova to the Security Council was the first time a head of UNESCO has been invited in that capacity.

In her briefing, she explained that since the adoption of Resolution 2199 (in 2015), which prohibits trade in cultural property from Iraq and Syria, efforts were well-underway to disrupt terrorist financing through the illicit trafficking of antiquities.

“Together, UNESCO, INTERPOL, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), customs services, the private sector and museums are all bolstering cooperation, coordinating new action,” she noted.



Irina Bokova, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), addresses the Security Council. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Through the newly-adopted resolution, the Security Council also underlined that such destruction can hamper post-conflict reconciliation, undermine economic and cultural development and, that, in certain conditions, could constitute a war crime.

“Weapons are not enough to defeat violent extremism. Building peace requires culture also; it requires education, prevention, and the transmission of heritage,” added Ms. Bokova.

“This is the message of this historic resolution,” she stated.

Need for supply chain integrity and stopping illicit trade of cultural property

Also today, the top UN political official said that in addition to making every effort to implement the international legal and normative framework on protection of culture, as well as strengthen international cooperation, a response was needed from global criminal justice to prevent trafficking in cultural property by disrupting organized criminal and terrorist networks.



The Security Council unanimously adopts resolution 2347 (2017), condemning the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage in the context of armed conflicts, notably by terrorist groups. UN Photo/Manuel Elias

“We need to put a stronger focus on investigation, cross-border cooperation and exchange of information, and on bringing in private and public sector partners, including dealers and the tourism sector, to promote supply chain integrity and stop the illicit trade and sale of cultural property.”

Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of UNODC also welcomed the resolution’s emphasis on international cooperation in crime prevention and criminal justice responses to counter trafficking in cultural property.

“The resolution [...] addresses the vital issue of trafficking in cultural property as a source of terrorism financing, and also sets out ways of protecting cultural heritage during armed conflict where it is most vulnerable,” he said, noting that it strengthened the international community’s ability to tackle the issue and help acts that fund terrorism, and enable yet more destruction and looting of cultural sites and archaeological treasures.

Also speaking at the Security Council, Commander Fabrizio Parulli of the Carabinieri Italiani (the national gendarmerie of Italy) and the UNESCO Unite4Heritage task force shared the latest data on illicit trafficking, and said that over the course of last year, 800,000 artefacts had been seized by Italian forces in the fight against the financing of criminal activities.

AUDIO: The destruction of cultural heritage by terrorists, described as “cultural cleansing” by Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is a war crime.

[UN spotlights slave descendants’ legacy of achievements, overcoming ‘dark chapter of human history’](#)

24 March 2017 – Stressing the importance of remembering slavery and slave trade in human history, the legacy of which “resounds down the ages,” United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today highlighted the contributions that people of African descent have made and are continuing to make to their communities and to the world.

“We must never forget this dark chapter of human history,” Mr. Guterres told a General Assembly meeting to commemorate the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, ahead of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

The International Day, observed annually on 25 March, offers the opportunity to honour and remember those who suffered and died at the hands of the brutal slavery system, and aims to raise awareness about the dangers of racism and

prejudice today.

“We must always remember the role played by many of our countries – including my own country of Portugal – in carrying out the largest forced migration in history and in robbing so many millions of people of their dignity and often also of their lives,” Mr. Guterres said.

The legacy of slavery resounds down the ages, and the world has yet to overcome racism. While some forms of slavery may have been abolished, others have emerged to blight the world, including human trafficking and forced and bonded labour. “Heeding the lessons of yesterday means fighting these ills today,” he said.



A close-up from the memorial on the legacy of slavery. UN Photo/Devra Berkowitz

This year’s commemoration comes as the UN Remember Slavery Programme, which, in addition to educating about one of history’s greatest tragedies, works to combat racism and prejudice, marks the 10th anniversary of its establishment.

The Programme’s theme for 2017 is ‘Remember Slavery: Recognizing the Legacy and Contributions of People of African Descent.’ It urges remembrance of the fact that the transatlantic slave trade, while forming a very dark chapter in human history, also led to an unprecedented transfer of knowledge and culture from Africa to the Americas, Europe and elsewhere.

The Programme also invited Lonnie G. Bunch III, Director of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., to deliver a keynote address at the Assembly’s commemorative meeting today.

AUDIO: Slavery is the last great “unmentionable” that has profoundly shaped every corner of the world although it happened centuries ago, the Dr Lonnie Bunch III, Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture has said.

The descendants of slaves have made their mark as inventors, economists and jurists; as authors and scholars; as artists and athletes; as politicians and civil rights leaders.

Mae Jemison was the first African-American woman to enter outer space. Ralph Bunche, the first African-American won a Nobel Prize and was one of the most respected and celebrated international civil servants in the history of the United Nations. Derek Walcott, the poet and Nobel laureate from Saint Lucia who died one week ago, confronted the brutality of slavery and the legacy of colonialism through his poetry and writings.

“The United Nations and I personally attach the greatest importance to the challenge of slavery, past and present,” Mr. Guterres said, urging all to

unite against hatred at this time of rising divisiveness and build a world of freedom and dignity for all.

In order to more permanently honour the victims, a memorial has been erected at UN Headquarters in New York. The unveiling took place on 25 March 2015. The winning design for the memorial, The Ark of Return by Rodney Leon, an American architect of Haitian descent, was selected through an international competition and announced in September 2013.

Peter Thomson, the President of the General Assembly, called for the protection of human rights and an end to racism, xenophobia and modern forms of slavery, including human trafficking, forced labour and child labour.

The consequences of slavery had not ended with emancipation, but continued to this day, he emphasized. Some were negative, but others positive, he said, underscoring the contributions made by descendants of slavery to shaping multicultural societies.

PHOTO FEATURE: The enduring legacy of the transatlantic slave trade

24 March 2017 – The transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration in history and undeniably one of the most inhumane. According to the United Nations, over a 400-year period, the forcible extraction of Africans from their motherland was unprecedented in the annals of recorded human history

In 2007, the General Assembly declared 25 March as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, to be observed annually.

The Day offers an opportunity to honour those who suffered at the hands of the brutal slavery system. It also aims to raise awareness about the dangers of racism and prejudice today.



: Annual Global Student Video Conference Commemorating Victims of Slavery.
Photo: UN Photo/Manuel Elias

This year the theme “Remember Slavery: Recognising the Legacy and Contributions of People of African Descent” recognises the horrors of the slave trade, while acknowledging that it led to an unprecedented transfer of knowledge and culture from Africa to the Americas, Europe and elsewhere.

Enslaved Africans brought with them advanced techniques of farming, working

metals such as gold and iron, and boat building, among others. Those skills need to be remembered and celebrated.

“This is a story that has shaped almost every culture of the world,” Dr. Lonnie G. Bunch III, Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture told UN News.

Visitor’s take in “A Legacy of Black Achievement,” an exhibit at the UN featuring 21 figures who have personified the vital contributions that Africans and their descendants have made globally – from science and technology to political activism and the arts. Photo: UN News/ Elizabeth Scaffidi

This commemoration also acknowledges the enduring contributions of the vibrant African diaspora, which continue to enrich cultures across the globe.

Through music, dance, spirituality, sport, literature, art and cuisine, the diaspora has enabled societies to advance in science, technology, business, politics, law, social justice and international diplomacy, to name just a few.

The theme for this year’s International Day appropriately invites us to appreciate and honour the diaspora’s tremendous achievements.

Looking back to move forward

According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), between the 15th and 19th centuries, the Island of Gorée, off the coast of Senegal, was the largest trading centre of slaves from the African coast.



The island of Gorée lies off the coast of Senegal, opposite Dakar. Photo: UNESCO/Richard Veillon

On the Island of Gorée, the architecture of the House of Slaves and its Door of No Return is characterized by the contrast between the dark slave quarters and the elegant houses of the slave traders. In 1962, it became a museum to memorialize the final exit point of the slaves from Africa. Today, the island is a symbol of human exploitation and a sanctuary for reconciliation.



‘The Ark of Return’ honours the memories of the estimated 15 million men, women and children who were victims of the forced extraction. Photo: UN News/ UN/Elizabeth Scaffidi