

Enhancing regional partnerships among top priorities for UN Peacebuilding Commission in 2017

25 January 2017 – Strengthening the United Nation's partnerships with the African Union, empowering women and youth, and greater cooperation with the World Bank will be among the key priorities this year for the UN Peacebuilding Commission, its new chair today said.

Outlining the intergovernmental advisory board's objectives, Cho Tae-yul, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the UN, told journalists in New York that he is "very much encouraged" by the enthusiasm among Member States for great international cooperation which "bodes very well for the Peacebuilding Commission."

He detailed a number of priorities, including building on progress achieved in strengthening partnerships with regional and sub-regional groups.

"They are better poised to understand the root causes," Mr. Cho said, adding that he is personally in support of stronger regional cooperation, particularly in Africa, where all six of the countries currently on the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) agenda are located. Those countries are: Burundi; Sierra Leone; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Liberia; and Central African Republic.

In addition to country-specific work, the Commission also works thematically, on issues such as institution building, and enhancing the participation of women and youth.

The PBC will also this year continue to work on becoming a "more transparent, accountable and flexible body" through the use of new working methods. A number of new improvements were introduced just this morning, Mr. Cho said.

Created in 2005, the PBC supports a country through all stages of a conflict, including post-conflict recovery and socio-economic development. It sits between the UN Security Council, whose 15 members are primarily tasked with maintaining peace and security in the world; the General Assembly, whose membership includes all 193 Member States; and the Economic and Social Council, or ECOSOC, which works with the 14 specialized UN agencies.

It works closely with regional bodies such as the African Union, European Union and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and representatives from the countries who are the top financial and troop contributors to the UN, as well as from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Increased financial support for the Peacebuilding Fund, which has allocated \$623 million since its creation at the end of 2015, is also a key priority for the year. Mr. Cho said that he has "started preliminary dialogue" with

the World Bank to see how to secure the targeted annual figure of \$100 million.

He is also working to “enhance the Fund through strategic partnerships” with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and other partners.

The *UN News Centre* highlighted the work of the PBC and the Peacebuilding Fund in a feature series this past August. Travel with us to Mali to see how the Fund is helping communities come back together after war.

[UN, NYC Mayor's office team up to promote Global Goals' mental health targets](#)

25 January 2017 – Addressing an event on mental health, a special advisor to the President of the United Nations General Assembly today stressed the importance of mental health for all actions to be taken to achieve sustainable development goals.

“All actions start with good health,” Dessima Williams, Special Adviser on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, told an event titled ‘Mental Health for All: Local Strategies,’ organized by the New York City Mayor’s Office for International Affairs and its cosponsors, including the World Health Organization (WHO).

She said that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by UN Member States in September 2015, are all interlinked, and noted that Goal 3 addresses mental health.

“We all know that the SDGs are indivisible,” she continued, explaining that, for example, education has an impact on skills, knowledge, attitudes and values, and in this way can help change production and consumption behaviours and patterns.

The Office of the President of the General Assembly, she said, is raising awareness of all the SDGs.

She noted that Assembly President Peter Thomson had sent a letter to all Heads of Government, urging them to support teaching about the SGDs. The Office was represented at the World Innovation Summit for Health, held in Doha, Qatar, last year, and which featured some 1,400 health professionals examining a report on healthy populations.



Dessima Williams, Special Adviser on Implementation of the Sustainable

Development Goals, addresses at UN Headquarters an event titled 'Mental Health for All: Local Strategies.' UN Photo/Evan Schneider

The Office is also raising the awareness of the need for universal healthcare and universal health care coverage by setting aside 12 December to mark the Universal Healthcare Coverage Day.

While applauding New York City's local initiative on mental health, Ms. Dessima stressed the worldwide need to end the stigma surrounding mental health and to convey the importance of early attention for good mental health "as a good in itself and as a conduit to a life worth living."

Also addressing the event were Chirlane McCray, First Lady of New York City, Caleb Otto, Permanent Representative of Palau to the United Nations, and Richard Buery, Deputy Mayor of New York City for Strategic Policy Initiatives.

The event also included a panel discussion on NYC's initiative, "ThriveNYC: Local roadmap to mental health."

[Somalia: UN mission condemns Al-Shabaab attack on popular Mogadishu hotel](#)

25 January 2017 – The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) has condemned the coordinated suicide bombing attack earlier today at a hotel in Mogadishu for which Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility and which reportedly killed dozens of people.

According to the United Nations, the attack, on the Dayah Hotel (known locally as the Dayax), reportedly killed dozens of Somali civilians and soldiers, while wounding many more. The hotel is located near the Presidential palace and is frequently visited by lawmakers in the capital.

In an interview with *UN News*, Joseph Contreras, the spokesperson for the Mission, said the attack provides fresh evidence of the violent extremists' desperate attempts to derail Somalia's electoral process. Moreover it reflects the terrorists' frustration over their inability to sabotage the recent voting for seats in the two Houses of Somalia's new Parliament.

As for the scene on the ground, he pointed out that first responders arrived at the hotel targeted by the attack "quite quickly and brought the situation under control."

"The latest figures that we have been seeing range from between 15 and 20 dead, some of whom were the attackers themselves, some of them Somali soldiers," Mr. Contreras said, adding that perhaps about half of were civilians and among the dozens of injured were at least 5 journalists. He was not aware if any lawmakers were visiting the hotel.

UN relief official urges calm amid fears of fresh violence in Central African Republic town

25 January 2017 – Amid rising tensions in Central African Republic's Ouaka prefecture and in and around its town of Bambari, a senior UN humanitarian official in the country has appealed for calm and refraining from any act that could further increase the fragility of an already vulnerable population.

"With a population of 42,000 and more than 26,000 displaced people, an open conflict in Bambari would be devastating to the civilian population," said Michel Yao, the Acting Humanitarian Coordinator in the country.

Calling on all armed groups and non-State actors to realize the impact of a violent confrontation on the already sensitive situation of the local population, Dr. Yao added: "The likelihood of such a conflict suggests a dangerous increased in the fragility of the displaced population whose vulnerability remains a source of concern in several aspects."

Further, urging armed and non-State groups not to jeopardize the achievements of the last two years in terms of reconciliation and social cohesion, as well as the improvement in the humanitarian situation, Dr. Yao encouraged and supported all efforts from the UN mission in the country, known by the French acronym MINUSCA, the international community and national authorities to avoid clashes that could threaten the protection of the civilians.

People in and around Bambari, located some 385 kilometres (about 240 miles) north east of the nation's capital Bangui, have already suffered the consequences of several waves of violence by armed groups.

Additionally, since the start of conflict Bria – the capital of the neighbouring Haute-Kotto prefecture – last September, more than 18,000 newly displaced persons have arrived in the Ouaka prefecture, which borders the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In Bambari town, there more than 300 newly displaced from the Bambari-Ippy-Bria axis, all in dire need of relief.

"I call on all parties to the conflict to ensure the unimpeded humanitarian access to the vulnerable groups of people by the humanitarians and vice versa" noted Dr. Yao.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013. According to the UN, more more than half the population is in dire need of assistance. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

In December 2016, the Mission supported a new dialogue between 11 of the 14 armed groups, as part of an ongoing effort to disarm the factions.

Fighting impunity is the best way to protect Mexico's human rights defenders – UN expert

25 January 2017 – A United Nations rights expert expressed concern today about widespread impunity for crimes against human rights defenders in Mexico, noting that the situation is inducing more violations.

"The failure to investigate and sanction aggressors has signalled a dangerous message that there are no consequences for committing such crimes. This creates an environment conducive to repetition of violations," warned Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur with a mandate to monitor and report on the promotion and protection of defenders in the world.

Mr. Forst visited Mexico from 16 to 24 January 2017, crisscrossing from Mexico City to the states of Chihuahua, Guerrero, Oaxaca and State of Mexico. He met with more than 800 human rights defenders from 24 states, 60 per cent of whom were women.

Noting the "elevated levels of insecurity and violence facing them in the country" in the complex context of organized crime, corruption in the country, and State repression, he warned that "impunity has become both the cause and the effect of the overall insecurity of human rights defenders in Mexico."

"Impunity feeds criminalization of defenders, which in turn fuels fear among broader civil society, undermining the general aspirations for human rights and the rule of law," said Mr. Forst in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). "For human rights defenders, the best protection they could have is when justice is served and perpetrators are held accountable."

On the final day of his visit, the expert delivered a preliminary report with a series of recommendations to the Mexican authorities and other actors to improve the protection of human rights defenders and enable their important work.

“Only by joining efforts will Mexico be able to overcome the serious situation in which defenders are carrying out their work, which is core to a democratic society,” he stressed.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.