

Colombia: UN chief Guterres welcomes start of peace talks with ELN



The city of Quito, Ecuador, which was declared a World Heritage Site by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in the late 1970s. Photo: © UNESCO/Francesco Bandarin

8 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed yesterday's launch of formal peace talks between the Government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Ecuador's capital, Quito, his spokesperson said today in a statement.

In the talks with the second-largest opposition group, the Government seeks an agreement similar to the one reached last year with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), to end a five decade-long conflict.

"Resolving this conflict is essential to achieving a comprehensive peace in Colombia, to saving lives and to advancing sustainable development across the whole country," said the statement.

"The Secretary-General takes note of the commitment of the parties to listen to the voices of the communities affected by the conflict," it stated, adding that the UN chief commended Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Norway and Venezuela for their commitment as guarantors, as well as the other accompanying and supporting countries.

Côte d'Ivoire could be 'success story' if peacekeeping gains fully backed, Security Council told

8 February 2017 – Côte d'Ivoire is on the path to durable stability, the United Nations envoy for the country today told the Security Council, but warned that authorities need to invest more in national reconciliation and transitional justice, and to improve the economic, social and cultural rights of Ivoirians.

"With a new Constitution and an inclusive legislature, Côte d'Ivoire is presented with the opportunity and momentum to fully consolidate the country's achievements towards long-term stability," Aïchatou Mindaoudou, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire said

presenting the latest Secretary-General's report on developments in the country.

She noted that the people of Côte d'Ivoire must more fully enjoy "the dividends of the thriving economy that has remarkably recovered since the post-election crisis of 2010/2011."

The country is on track to becoming Africa's fastest-growing economy, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

This is a remarkable change from 2010, when the Security Council, at the request of the Government, agreed to keep the UN peacekeeping mission that Ms. Mindaoudou heads, known by the French acronym ONUCI, on the ground to protect civilians, protect good offices and support the Ivorian Government in disarmament, among other responsibilities.

All peacekeepers are now due to leave the country in four months, as agreed by the Council and the Government in resolution 2284 (2016), with the majority of the Mission's uniformed personnel to depart by 15 February.



Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire Aïchatou Mindaoudou addresses the Security Council. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Addressing the Security Council for one of the last times before the Mission winds down in April, said the work of the UN in Côte d'Ivoire could be "a real success story" if the authorities finance activities to consolidate the peacekeeping gains ONUCI made over the past 14 years.

"In all of these, our combined support – the Security Council, Member States, international and regional partners, and the UN system in Côte d'Ivoire – remains essential to ensure that Côte d'Ivoire is definitely heading towards sustainable peace and stability," she stressed.

She also highlighted the need to investigate and prosecute crimes committed during the post-2010 election crisis, particularly those related to sexual and gender-based crimes.

"The timely and expeditious adjudication of such cases is critical to ensuring the safety and security of the most vulnerable of societies – women and children," said Ms. Mindaoudou.

The Special Representative also called for greater efforts to enhance the standard of living of soldiers and to organize a professional army. She said it was "essential" that authorities prioritize the institutional reforms of the military, gendarmerie and police, as well as reinstate ex-combatants.

The comments come as ONUCI peacekeepers reported that they were monitoring sporadic arms fire by disgruntled soldiers of the Ivorian Special Forces who say they were not paid the bonuses that the Government promised them.

Parliament votes for an independent UK

Parliament voted 494 to 122 to notify the European Union of our intention to leave.

Parliament voted to carry out the wishes of the people, as expressed in the referendum.

Parliament, after much debate, self examination and passionate exchange, voted to take back control.

The puppet Parliament of recent years, nodding through countless laws from Brussels, decided it must take responsibility again.

Over the last two weeks of debate, Parliament has come to life.

Many MPs wanted to be in the chamber.

Many MPs wanted to speak.

MPs who voted Remain in the referendum agonised over the conflict between their own view and the decision of the people which they had sought.

MPs who voted Leave spoke to reassure their Remain voters that once independent the UK can thrive and prosper.

The decision of Parliament, backing the decision of the people, will be formally communicated to Brussels.

As lawyers on both sides in the Supreme Court case argued, once sent the country will leave the EU.

That is why the decision mattered so much.

I was impressed by the size of the vote to leave, and the scale of the majority.

It is true the Lords needs to do the same

But how can the unelected House reject the will of the people in the referendum and the will of the Commons by such a big majority?

The people are sovereign.

Parliament can be sovereign between elections, once we are out of the EU.

It can only preserve the trust of enough people if it carries out their wishes.

After all the passion, the self doubts of individuals and whole parties,

after the technical arguments and legal sophistries

Parliament understood.

Tonight Parliament has grasped that the once sovereign Parliament can be sovereign again.

It has understood that it can only hold that power if it pleases the people.

All UK democrats can sleep well in their beds tonight.

The people's will has prevailed.

Parliament is ready to serve again.

Parliament voted to take back control.

[UN commemorates 20 years of protecting children in armed conflicts](#)

8 February 2017 – Top officials from the United Nations and the international community today applauded two decades of efforts to protect children from the scourge of war by marking the 20th anniversary of General Assembly resolution 51/77 (1997) on promotion and protection of the rights of children.

In an informal meeting of the 193-member Assembly in New York, the UN body's President, Peter Thomson, called the resolution "a landmark development in our global efforts to improve the protection of children in conflict situations."

"Among the incomprehensible horrors that take place in the chaos of warzones, unconscionable crimes, violations, exploitation and abuse are perpetrated against the most vulnerable members of our societies – namely our children," Mr. Thomson said.

He called for a concerted effort to protect children in armed conflict as part of the international community's commitments to peace and security, sustainable development and human rights.

Mr. Thomson spoke alongside Leila Zerrougui, the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. As an outcome of the historic resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to name a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. In addition to Ms. Zerrougui, today's event recognized past mandate-holders – Graça Machel, Olara Otunnu and Radhika Coomaraswamy.

It was Ms. Machel's landmark report back in 1996 that led to the creation of

the mandate and the appointment of a Special Representative.



A view of the Trusteeship Council Chamber during the General Assembly informal meeting to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

She urged Member States to consider children as “zones of peace” and said that by focusing on them, “politicians, Governments, the military and non-State entities will begin to recognize how much they destroy through armed conflict, and therefore, how little they gain.”

The best way to protect children from armed conflict is to prevent armed conflict in the first place, Ms. Machel wrote. That idea was echoed in the message of Secretary-General António Guterres, delivered by his Chef de Cabinet, Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti.

The Secretary-General identified good quality education and productive, decent work for young people as prerequisites for both peace and development.

When prevention fails, however, he called on the Special Representative’s Office to continue monitoring and reporting violations to promote informed and timely action.

“We also need to continue to and strengthen engagement with local and national authorities, regional partners, and civil society to prevent and protect children from grave violations,” Mr. Guterres said.

Grave violations against children

- Recruitment and use of children
- Killing and maiming
- Rape and sexual violence in conflict
- Attacks on schools and hospitals
- Abduction of children
- Denial of humanitarian access

The Office of the Special Representative has over the years worked with other UN agencies, notably the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to protect children in conflict areas.

Among the joint projects is the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, which aims to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by Government armies. Since 2000, the work of the Office and partners has led to the release of more than 115,000 child soldiers.

“Children don’t belong on the battlefield, they belong in school where they can build a future,” said UNICEF Executive Director Tony Lake, who participated in the event.

Assistant-Secretary-General Miroslav Jenca, who represented the UN Department of Political Affairs, a key partner of Ms. Zerrougui's Office, reiterated the importance of integration to protect children.

For example, he highlighted the utility of a checklist for drafting children and armed conflict provisions developed with UN and partners, as a useful tool for mediators.

[Clive Lewis to step down from shadow cabinet](#)

Clive Lewis MP, commenting on stepping down from the shadow cabinet said:

"When I became the MP for Norwich South, I promised my constituents I would be 'Norwich's voice in Westminster, not Westminster's voice in Norwich'. I therefore cannot, in all good conscience, vote for something I believe will ultimately harm the city I have the honour to represent, love and call home.

"It is therefore with a heavy heart that I have decided to resign from the shadow cabinet.

"It has been a privilege to work with Jeremy Corbyn and be part of the shadow cabinet. I will continue to support our party and our leader from the back benches to the very best of my ability."

Jeremy Corbyn MP, commenting on Clive Lewis standing down from the shadow cabinet, said:

"I would like to thank Clive for his work in the shadow cabinet, which has underlined what an asset he is to the Labour Party and our movement.

"I understand the difficulties MPs representing constituencies which voted Remain have in relation to the European Union Withdrawal Bill. MPs have a duty to represent their constituents as well as their party.

"However, the Labour Party respects the outcome of the EU referendum, so we have asked all Labour MPs to vote for the Bill at its third reading tonight.

"We have been clear from

the start that Labour will not frustrate the triggering of Article 50, which represents the start of the process for leaving the EU.

“Labour will use every opportunity to hold the government to account and protect jobs, rights and living standards at every stage of the negotiations.

“I wish Clive well and look forward to working with him in the future.”