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Story

Iran

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement:

“We are deeply concerned by reported violations of international norms and standards on the use of force, including the firing of live ammunition, against demonstrators in Iran during the protests that began on Friday and have continued into this week. We are especially alarmed that the use of live ammunition has allegedly caused a significant number of deaths across the country.

While the fact that there have been some deaths has been acknowledged by the authorities, including by Ayatollah Khamenei, it has been extremely difficult to verify the overall number. However, Iranian media and a number of other sources suggest dozens of people may have been killed and many people injured.
during protests in at least eight different provinces, with over 1,000 protesters arrested. Overall, protests have reportedly been held in 40 or more towns and cities across the country, but again details have been hard to verify because of the shutdown of the internet late on Saturday.

We urge the Iranian authorities and security forces to avoid the use of force to disperse peaceful assemblies and in cases in which an assembly is violent to restrict the use of force to the greatest extent possible, especially actions that are likely to cause serious injury or loss of life. This includes issuing clear instructions to the security forces to abide by international norms and standards on the use of force, including ensuring that firearms are used only in cases of an imminent threat to life or of serious injury and only when less extreme measures are insufficient to address such a threat.

We also urge protesters to carry out demonstrations peacefully, without resorting to physical violence or destruction of property.

As Iran is a State party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, we call on the Iranian authorities to respect the right to freedom of expression, and the right to peaceful assembly and association, as laid down in the Covenant, which is a binding international treaty.

We also call on the Government to immediately re-establish Iranians’ access to the internet, as well as other forms of communication, which allow for freedom of expression and access to information.

While noting the serious economic challenges the country is experiencing, including in the context of sanctions imposed by the United States, we urge the Iranian Government to engage in meaningful dialogue with various actors in the country about the socio-economic challenges the population is facing, and to collectively work with a cross-section of society towards a sustainable resolution to these issues.

As so many other popular protests across the world have illustrated all too clearly in recent weeks and months, simply responding with harsh words and an iron fist raises a significant risk not only of violating international norms and standards but also of seriously aggravating the situation to everyone’s disadvantage, including the Government’s.

Protests of this nature and on this scale are an indication of deep-rooted and often well-founded grievances, that cannot simply be brushed aside.”

Responding to questions, Mr. Colville said that the protests had taken off the previous Friday and it was not sure whether they were continuing today. While short in duration, the protests were intense and widespread. They were most likely motivated by the deeply seated problems in the country, rather than just the rise in fuel prices that sparked the protest. The socio-economic crisis could be aggravated by sanctions. Reiterating United Nations position, Mr. Colville said that all sanctions needed to consider the impact on the human rights of the populations.

Responding to other questions, Mr. Colville said that the shutdown of the Internet made getting the information, including on casualties, very difficult, and called on Iran to maintain the flow of information. Certain Government officials had confirmed that deaths had occurred, and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was receiving reports putting the death toll around a dozen, or maybe even an higher number.

**Hong Kong Protests**

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement:

“We have been following with deepening concern the situation in the Hong Kong Special Administrative
Region over the past few months. We are gravely concerned about the increasing violence by groups of young people engaging in the protests who are clearly very angry, with deep-seated grievances.

The vast majority of the people of Hong Kong have been exercising their right of freedom of assembly peacefully and in accordance with the law – and the authorities have by and large respected the exercise of this right. The resort to extreme violence - including against the police force – by some engaged in the protests is therefore deeply regretted and cannot be condoned. We would appeal to all engaging in protests to renounce and condemn the use of violence.

With regard to the current situation at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, we urge the authorities to do all they can to de-escalate the situation, to address the humanitarian situation of those inside which is clearly deteriorating, and facilitate a peaceful resolution.

At this juncture, we are deeply concerned at the risk of further escalation of violence in Hong Kong. We therefore urge the Government to strengthen its efforts to bring together all sectors of society, including student groups, business community, political leaders, community leaders and others in a truly inclusive dialogue in order to find peaceful solutions to the grievances raised by a significant number of Hong Kong citizens.

Accountability for violence is also key – both in the case of individuals who have broken the law and committed acts of violence, but also in the case of allegations of excessive use of force by the police.

The UN Human Rights Office stands ready to advise and support constructive efforts by the Government of Hong Kong to resolve the crisis peacefully and through dialogue.”

Repression of dissent in Nicaragua

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement:

“We are very concerned by the situation of 13 people who as a form of protest entered a church in Nicaragua, which was subsequently encircled and sealed off by police. We are equally troubled that another group of opposition members was detained after bringing purely humanitarian aid to them, and who have been accused of serious criminal charges as a result.

On 14 November, eight relatives of jailed political opponents and another woman started a hunger strike inside the San Miguel church in Masaya, calling for the release of 130 individuals allegedly detained in the context of the protests. The same day, they found themselves surrounded by the police inside the church, together with the priest and three other people. The police cut water and electrical services off and prevented anyone from entering the church and delivering humanitarian supplies, including insulin for the priest, who has diabetes.

The same night, a group of at least 13 members of the opposition were detained after delivering some water to the people surrounded by the police. Their lawyers claim that their due process guarantees have not been respected. Prominent human rights defenders, such as Amaya Coppens and Olga Valle, are among the 13 persons detained. Coppens is a Belgian-Nicaraguan medical student leader who had been detained in the context of the protests for eight months and who was released on 11 June 2019 under the Amnesty Law. Her detention could be considered an act of reprisal for speaking up about the human rights situation in Nicaragua and reaching out to UN officials and mechanisms. She had recently met with the UN Human Rights Office in Geneva.

On Monday, the 13 members of the opposition and three other political opponents were charged with trafficking of weapons. We are very concerned that these apparently trumped-up charges may constitute a
renewed attempt to stifle dissent.

We were also informed on Monday that other eight people started a hunger strike inside the catedral of Managua, demanding the release of all individuals detained in the context of the protests. A doctor and an 11-year old child were accompanying them. Dozens of pro-government elements entered the cathedral hours later and reportedly intimidated and attacked them with stones, as well as the priest and a nun seemingly, with the acquiescence of police officers, who had surrounded the premises.

We urge the authorities to ensure the rights of those inside the church, in particular by refraining from interfering with the provision of food, water and medical assistance. Everyone should be allowed to exercise the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly without fear of being attacked. We also call for the release of all those who may be arbitrarily detained and ensure that their fundamental legal safeguards are respected.

The Government must end the persistent repression of dissent and the ongoing pattern of arbitrary arrests and refrain from criminalizing and attacking human rights defenders, political opponents and any other dissenting voices. We reiterate our readiness to support the Nicaraguan State to fulfil its international human rights obligations and go back to the country if access is granted.”

Asked if the Government of Nicaragua was in breach of international humanitarian law, Mr. Colville stressed that this body of law applied to armed conflict and not to this situation. The denial of essential supplies, however, constituted a breach of human rights, including the right to life. Mr. Colville did not have the information on patterns of persecution of members of the Catholic Church.

**Presidential pardons in the United States**

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement:

“We are very concerned by the recent US presidential pardons for three US service members accused of war crimes. These three cases involve serious violations of international humanitarian law, both proven and alleged, including the shooting of a group of civilians and execution of a captured member of an armed group.

International Humanitarian Law establishes the obligation to investigate violations and prosecute war crimes. By investigating these allegations, and initiating and completing criminal proceedings, the US military justice system has been complying with these obligations under international law.

The full pardons in two cases, and the order directing promotion in the third case, run against the letter and the spirit of international law which requires accountability for such violations. The pardon terminating pending criminal proceedings in the case of Major Mathew Golsteyn is particularly troubling, as it cuts short the regular judicial process.

Victims of gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law have the right to a remedy. This right includes equal and effective access to justice, the right to the truth, and to see perpetrators serve punishments proportionate to the seriousness of their conduct, rather than see them absolved of responsibility.

While pardons exist in international law, and can properly address issues of injustice or unfairness, in the present cases no circumstances have been advanced to suggest anything other than simply voiding the otherwise proper process of law in the cases. These pardons send a disturbing signal to military forces all around the world.”
Responding to questions, Mr. Colville noted that it was very striking that members of the United States military forces had spoken against the pardons. Committing war crimes was a very serious violation of the law and military relied on discipline to function well, he said. These pardons were very troubling, since all those who had committed serious crimes should be held accountable.

**Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories**

Rupert Colville, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), read the following statement:

“As part of United Nations Secretariat, we continue to follow the longstanding position of the United Nations that the Israeli settlements are in breach of international law.

A change in the policy position of one State does not modify existing international law, nor its interpretation by the International Court of Justice and the Security Council.”

A journalist noted that several non-governmental organizations had called on United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to release the database of companies operating in Israeli settlements. Mr. Colville said that the High Commissioner for Human Rights would release this database.

Asked to explain which key aspect of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions Israel breached, Mr. Colville noted that the Fourth Geneva of 1949, one of the most ratified international treaties in existence, clearly prohibited the occupying power to transfer its civilian population into territories it occupied. The 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice had found that the Israeli settlements into Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in East Jerusalem, had been established in breach of international law.

Numerous United Nations Security Council resolutions declared that the settlements did not have legal validity; such was the resolution 446 of 1979 and the resolution 2334 of 2016. The latter stated that the establishment of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 including in East Jerusalem, did not have legal validity and constituted flagrant violation of international law.

The European Court of Justice had noted in the last week’s judgement that the settlements established in some of the territories occupied by the State of Israel gave concrete expression to a policy of population transfer conducted by that State outside of its territory, in violation of international humanitarian law.

Asked whether this was an explosive situation that was likely to trigger the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, Mr. Colville said that there would be more and more statements coming out, from the European Union for examples, and there would certainly be others from various parts of United Nations later today.

Alessandra Vellucci, for the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, recalled that Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, had recently reiterated the appeal for calm and de-escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip.

**Bolivia**

Responding to questions on the situation in Bolivia, Mr. Colville said that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had issued a press release on Saturday and had a team in place, which continued to do its work.

**Crisis in central Sahel - Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**

Hervé Verhoosel, for the World Food Programme (WFP), read the following statement:
“The world does not yet fully grasp the extent of the mounting humanitarian crisis in the central Sahel region - encompassing Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger- which is fuelled by violent clashes between armed groups, population displacement, hunger and widespread poverty.

If we do not act now to tackle hunger in the Sahel, a whole generation are at risk.

20 million people now live in conflict affected areas across the region, and they are bearing the brunt of this unfolding crisis as hunger and malnutrition looms. Already, over 860,000 people across the three Sahelian countries have fled their homes in search of safety and remain internally displaced, and over 270,000 are living as refugees across the three countries- 26,100 in Burkina Faso, 187,140 in Mali and 56,000 in Niger. The conflict is devastating agriculture and rural economies, and almost one in three children is out of school in many conflict-affected areas. This year, more than 2.4 million people require urgent food and nutrition assistance in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

This rise and spread of armed groups and fighting in the Central Sahel is seriously limiting humanitarian access to families in need. The security situation in some areas – like Burkina Faso – has been transformed in the space of a few short years, with serious implications as communities are unable to access assistance, basic services and livelihood opportunities. Access for humanitarians is vital if we are to meet the needs of the people of Central Sahel.

The world must step up to save lives in the Sahel – immediate humanitarian action is essential to save lives, protect livelihoods and safeguard development gains made in recent years. We must address the root causes of hunger and inequality - economic opportunities for communities caught up in the crisis can provide young people with viable alternatives to joining armed insurgencies.

If we do not tackle hunger in the Sahel, a whole generation are at risk. Investments in resilience by WFP and partners in the last few years mean that people migrate less; and the livelihoods of the poorest have begun to diversify.

WFP has stepped up its response, providing more than 2.6 million people with food and nutrition assistance so far this year in the three Central Sahel countries, focusing its efforts on areas where humanitarian needs are most severe and where large-scale population displacements have taken place.

WFP urgently needs US$150 million for operations across the Central Sahelian nations of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, under existing programmes that include both emergency activities and resilience-building programmes.”

Briefing on the phone from Rome, David Bulman, WFP Country Director in Burkina Faso, said that in the number of displaced people in this country had risen from 40,000 at the end of last year to 482,000 now. It was projected that, by the end of the year, the number of displaced would rise to 650,000. Those people were already poor, getting their living out of farming and animal raising. When displaced, they had to leave their livelihoods behind. The first to help them were the local communities, and World Food Programme came quickly afterwards to provide food assistance.

Malnutrition rates had risen too, as high as over 19 per cent in some areas – knowing that the threshold beyond which a situation was considered an emergency was 15 per cent, remarked Mr. Bulman. Health centres and schools had closed in some areas, leaving some 880,000 people without an access to health care, while 330,000 children were out of school.

WFP was providing emergency assistance to 217,000 people, nutritional support to children and pregnant women, emergency school feeding and early recovery support, including by helping people to get access to land, seeds and tools. In August 84 per cent of the children did not have access to adequate quantities of food.
While WFP was scaling up its activities, there was a need for greater attention to the crisis in Burkina Faso, including from donors, Mr. Bulman concluded.

Journalists asked whether, due to conflict and violence, people were also fleeing across the borders and where the origins of the crisis could be traced. Mr. Bulman said that, indeed, there had been cases of people fleeing Burkina Faso to neighbouring countries. People did not see the borders; they saw a route to safety, and they took it, even if it meant to end up in another country. The armed groups involved in the conflict in Burkina Faso were also active in Mali and in Niger. “This is a three-country crisis”, Mr. Bulman stressed, and added that climate change certainly aggravated the level of vulnerability of the population as it shortened the duration of the rainy season, which was when people planted crops. In insecure areas, farming had been disrupted as people either could not plant or had to abandon their crops in the field.

In response to other questions, Mr. Bulman said that severe acute malnutrition rates among the displaced population was 7.8 per cent, which was much higher than the 2 per cent emergency threshold. As for the number of displaced, Mr. Bulman said that WFP endorsed the Government’s projection of 650,000 internally displaced persons by end of the year, as insecurity continued to displace people daily.

While there was some State presence in the insecure areas, Mr. Bulman concluded, it was hard to ensure the provision of health and education services, so clinic and schools were closing. Migration was not to Europe but primarily to the cities.

**Libya: civilians die in factory air strike**

Joel Millman, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), read the following statement:

“International Organization for Migration deplores this morning’s airstrike on a factory in Wadi Rabii, South Tripoli, that the Libyan Ministry of Health says has claimed the lives of at least seven people, including five migrant workers.

Thirty migrants were also injured in the attack, the Ministry said.

“This attack is a stark reminder of the hostile conditions and risks migrants and local communities face on a daily basis,” said IOM Libya Chief of Mission Federico Soda. “Civilians are not a target; their safety must be guaranteed by all parties to the conflict.”

Hundreds of civilians have died in clashes in Tripoli since the latest round of violence began in April, including 53 migrants killed in an airstrike on the Tajoura detention centre in July.

According to IOM Libya Displacement Tracking Matrix, there are over 110,000 migrants in Tripoli and surrounding areas, and 2,000 others in detention centres, who remain at risk as clashes continue in the capital. Roughly 128,000 civilians have been displaced due to the fighting.“.

Journalists asked whether this increased the concern about the safety of people in detention and whether the IOM operations to transport people out of the country had essentially stalled. Mr. Millman explained that the target of the air strike was not a detention centre but a biscuit factory and reaffirmed the heightened concern for the safety of people. Voluntary humanitarian return absolutely depended on the willingness of the migrants to return to their countries of origin.

**Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants in Colombia and Peru**

Joel Millman, for the International Organization for Migration (IOM), read the following statement:

“The number of refugees and migrants from Venezuela is expected to reach 5.5 million by the end of next
year, according to the recently launched **Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP)**. Facing that daunting challenge, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Citi Foundation launched a project on Monday to enhance the livelihoods of Venezuelans and host communities in Colombia and Perú.

The Citi Foundation works to promote economic progress and improve the lives of people in low-income communities around the world.

The exodus of Venezuelan nationals is one of the largest external displacement crises in the world today. Around half of the 4.6 million people who have left Venezuela since 2015 can be found in neighbouring Colombia and Perú. Figures are projected to reach 2.4 million in Colombia and 978,000 in Perú next year. Many, in fact, are nationals of those two Andean countries, citizens of Colombia and Perú who spent years, even decades, living and working in neighbouring Venezuela.

A significant number of Venezuelans arrive with qualifications and skills to contribute to the economy of the hosting countries, but access to formal employment can often prove difficult.

The partnership will provide vocational training and certifications to more than 400 Venezuelan youth. The project also includes an incubator for mixed entrepreneurial ventures comprised of Venezuelans, Colombian returnees and host community members. IOM’s non-profit partner, USA for IOM, will host educational events in the US to further raise awareness on the issue.

‘There needs to be much more attention on the magnitude of the crisis, as the outflow continues unabated and is growing by the day,’ said Luca Dall’Oglio, CEO of USA for IOM. ‘This partnership offers a space for the private sector, humanitarian and development actors, civil society and international financial institutions to discuss support not only for emergency assistance but long-term needs like socioeconomic and cultural integration.’

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**The Minamata Convention on Mercury**

Rossana Silva, Executive Secretary with the Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, said that the Minamata Convention on Mercury was the youngest environmental agreement. It was adopted in 2013 and entered into force in 2017. So far, it had 114 Parties - 113 States and the European Union – and as mandated, the Conference of Parties (COP), which was the Convention’s decision-making body – met on an annual basis. Because the Convention was new, it was very important to adopt rules and guidelines, and to discuss technical issues that would help the countries implement the Convention.

The third next COP would take place from 25 to 29 November in Geneva. It would open at 10 a.m. on Monday 25 November, in the presence of the Executive Director of UNEP. There would be a series of plenary sessions and an important special science event to show the link between science and policy. It was the findings of science that had led the international community to adopt of the Minamata Convention, that aimed to make mercury history.

Anna García Sans, Communications and knowledge Management Officer with the Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury said that the media advisory had already been sent to the journalists.

**UNEP Emissions Gap Report**

Alejandro Laguna, for the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), announced the launch of the UNEP Emissions Gap Report, ahead of the UN-led Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The global launch would take place in Geneva in Press Room III on Tuesday 26 November at 9.15 a.m.
This report measured the gaps in greenhouse gas emissions and took into account what governments had committed so far in terms of their Nationally Determined Contributions. The report was now in its tenth year and would reflect on what had been happening in the decade. UNEP Executive Director would participate in the launch, together with the Secretary of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, and the Report’s lead author.

Mr. Laguna also said that the following week, starting on Monday 25 November, UNEP would be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Geneva Environment Network and the International Environment House. The celebration would be marked by different events, including a high-level discussion on the run-up to Stockholm+20 and the role of Geneva in placing the environment on the highest political agenda.

Guidelines for the Elimination of Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women in Parliament

Thomas Fitzsimons, for the International Parliamentary Union (IPU), read the following statement:

“The new Guidelines for the Elimination of Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women in Parliament follow the IPU’s ground-breaking research in 2016 and 2018 that revealed widespread abuse against women in parliaments. The new Guidelines will be published on Monday, 25 November, which is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the start of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.”

Zeina Hilal, Gender Equality Manager with the International Parliamentary Union, said that since 2016, the IPU had been investigating on sexism harassment and violence against women in parliaments, both women parliamentarians and women parliamentary staff. With the guidelines, the attention was now turning from investigation to a concrete action.

Reminding of the prevalence of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments, Ms. Hilal said that the IPU studies carried out in 2016 and 2018 had shown that 82 per cent of women suffered psychological violence, 25 per cent were victims of physical violence and 20 per cent were affected by sexual harassment. In 69.2 per cent of the cases, the perpetrators were male parliamentarians.

The studies also revealed worryingly low levels of reporting of abuses: only 24 per cent of women members of parliament would report the abuses. Only 6 per cent of sexually harassed women actually reported the abuse.

The guidelines were both a call for action by parliaments to put an end to harassment and violence and to clearly state a zero-tolerance policy within the institutions. They also proposed a methodology on how to do so, not only by parliamentary institutions, but others as well.

The guidelines were organized in three steps: mobilize for action (including to gather the political will); enshrine the standards in a policy and set up an independent complaint handling mechanisms inside parliaments that could work on these issues and in a safe, confidential environment and in a timely manner; and implementation, including changing the culture in parliaments, especially on power relations between men and women in these important constitutions as they legislate for the good of women and girls, but also boys and men in societies.

Responding to questions, Ms. Hilal said that the IPU had conducted two studies, a global one and another on the parliamentary structures of the Council of Europe. Both studies had identified similar levels of prevalence of violence against women in Parliaments. A stand-alone study in the African region had to be conducted in the future. Women seldom reported violence, which could be explained by the lack of adapted complaint mechanism and by fear.
Social Protection Funding Gaps report launch

Rosalind Yarde, for the International Labour Organization (ILO), read the following statement:

“A report presenting new estimates of the sums needed to achieve universal social protection in 134 developing countries around the world, will be launched on 26 November 2019 by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The amount is quite substantial and the report is saying that spending on coverage needs to increase dramatically to achieve universal coverage of a basic set of social protection measures, including cash transfers to children, maternity benefits for mothers with new bonds, disability benefits and old age social pensions.

There will be an embargo to press briefing on Thursday, 21 November at 3 p.m. Geneva time. The authors of the report as well as the Acting Director, the Social Protection Department, will be leading that briefing and the embargo will be lifted on Monday 25 November at 21:00 GMT, which is 22:00 Geneva time.

Social protection is a key issue that affects several of the Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty, gender equality, and decent work and economic growth.”

WHO Activities

Christian Lindmeier, for the World Health Organization (WHO), announced the launch of the first-ever global estimates of insufficient physical activity among adolescents aged 11 to 17 years old. The study was being published in The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health and was embargoed until 22 November 00:30 Geneva time.

The study described changes in levels of insufficient physical activity of boys and girls in all regions of the world, how this impacted young people’s health, and commitments countries took and could implement to respond to the health challenge posed by physical inactivity.

Mr. Lindmeier also announced a new WHO report that was calling for improved health monitoring and surveillance systems in prisons across the European region. As people in prison continued to suffer disproportionately from undiagnosed and untreated health conditions, they would add to the public health burden in the outside community after their release. The report presented an analysis of data collected in the health status of people in prison health systems for 39 countries in the European region.

Finally, Mr. Lindmeier announced that WHO would soon send a press release on a polio-related event, “Reaching the Last Mile”, which was on-going in Abu Dhabi.