

# UNITY

**THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA**

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Editor: Judy Cannon - 07 3358 2623  
Email: [judycnnn@yahoo.com.au](mailto:judycnnn@yahoo.com.au)

Contributing Editor: Ian Mathews - 02 6281 4025  
Email: [ian.mathews7@bigpond.com](mailto:ian.mathews7@bigpond.com)

NOTE: It is planned shortly to upgrade the UNity format and the new Contents Headings are part of the process to provide easier access to information. Until the new format is introduced, please note some links may continue to need to be copied and pasted into address space/browser.

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## **A. HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **AFRICA**

#### **SEXUAL ASSAULTS INCREASE IN KENYA**

With reports of increasing sexual assaults against women displaced by Kenya's post-election violence, a senior UN official called on the global community to recognise such crimes as an affront to basic human rights (22/1/08).

"Once again, women and girls are not just caught in the crossfire. They are on the battlefield," said Kemal Dervis, Administrator of the UN Development Program ([UNDP](#)).

"Time and time again we have seen women and girls targeted for rape and sexual abuse during periods of conflict. It is time for the global community to recognise this problem for what it is – an affront to basic human rights and human dignity," he said.

UNDP said there had been a sudden increase in the number of rape cases reported by Kenyan health facilities since the start of the crisis, which began after Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner over opposition leader Raila Odinga in December.

The ensuing violence, which has claimed some 600 lives and caused over 250,000 people to flee their homes, had put women and girls at great risk of sexual assault. Hospitals and health organisations were hard pressed to treat the rising number of rape victims, UNDP notes.

Medical personnel said that for each new case treated, there were many more victims who failed to seek help – either for security reasons or fear of stigmatisation.

UN agencies in Kenya were working together to ensure that women and girls received the best protection possible. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) is finalising plans to transfer more than 300 refugees – mainly from Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Burundi – who are fleeing violence in Nairobi to camps.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25370&Cr=kenya&Cr1=>

## MIDDLE EAST

### **IRAN: CANDIDATES BARRED FROM ELECTION**

More than half of the reformist candidates in Iran have been barred by the government from participating in parliamentary elections in March, a spokesman for the Reformists' Coalition said on Wednesday. Rejected candidates have until Saturday to appeal. [Google/Agence France-Presse](#) (23/1/08).

### **SAUDI WOMEN TO BE ABLE TO DRIVE**

Saudi Arabia is to lift the ban on female drivers in an attempt to stem a rising suffragette-style movement in the deeply conservative state, reports the London Telegraph (22/1/08). Government officials have confirmed the decision and plan to issue a decree by the end of the year. The move is designed to forestall protests for greater freedom by women, which have recently included campaigners driving cars through the Islamic state in defiance of a threat of detention and loss of livelihood. ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/01/21/1200764171827.html>

## ASIA PACIFIC

### **EAST TIMOR FACES 'ENORMOUS CHALLENGES'**

Despite an improvement in the overall security situation throughout Timor-Leste (East Timor), it continued to face enormous challenges that would require long-term support, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says in a new [report](#) (23/1/08).

Mr Ban noted that Timor-Leste was building on the gains of last year's peaceful election and working to restore normalcy. This followed fighting that killed at least 37 people and the displacement of about 155,000 others, or 15 per cent of the population.

"The first year of the new government and parliament remains a delicate time for the country," the Secretary-General writes in his latest report to the Security Council on the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT), covering the period Aug 21-Jan 7 2008. "The population has high expectations for tangible improvements in the quality of their daily lives, still marked by widespread poverty and unemployment," he said.

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25385&Cr=timor&Cr1=>

### **UN ENVOY HOPEFUL FOR NEPAL**

The top UN envoy to Nepal said he was optimistic that twice-delayed the Constituent Assembly polls would be staged successfully on April 10, given the desire of ordinary Nepalese for peace and democracy and the political leaders' demonstrated capacity for dialogue (23/1/08).

[Briefing the press](#) at UN Headquarters in New York, the Secretary-General's Special Representative to Nepal, Ian Martin, also commended the members of the seven-party government alliance for reaching consensus after several months of crisis and striking a 23-point agreement last month on cooperation over the elections.

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25387&Cr=nepal&Cr1=>

### **EU IN PAKISTAN ELECTION WARNING**

EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana has told President Pervez Musharraf that Pakistan's general elections next month must be "free and fair" and that the level of the EU's future cooperation with Pakistan depended on these criteria.

He was speaking as Mr Musharraf began an eight-day visit to Europe, with democracy and tackling terror on the agenda as he meets EU leaders, the BBC reported. The EU is Pakistan's biggest trading partner, with annual trade worth \$9 billion. Earlier President Musharraf said he was determined the country would hold "free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections".

He was due to visit the UK, France and the World Economic Forum in Switzerland. The BBC's Barbara Plett in Islamabad said Mr Musharraf was deeply unpopular at home. He told the European Parliament that instability in his country would not lead to the loss of control of its nuclear weapons as safeguards were securely in place.

ARTICLE: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7199502.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7199502.stm)

### **2008 LGBTI CAMPAIGN PLANS NSW ACTION**

A 2008 plan of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) events would include a civil union private member's Bill, backing adoption campaigns and organising the 30th anniversary of the Mardi Gras, the NSW Greens announced.

"A top priority is to reduce violence directed against the queer community," Greens MP Lee Rhiannon said (22/1/08). Greens police spokesperson Sylvia Hale has called on the Surry Hills police to be more proactive in combating the rising levels of violence around the Oxford Street precinct.

The Greens planned to move a private members Bill for same-sex and transgendered civil unions in the NSW Parliament and to campaign for marriage rights for all.

"We will step up our support for equal adoption and fostering rights for all couples, regardless of sex and sexuality," she said. Transgender rights would be taken up with the government including lobbying for all official documents to reflect socially presented sex and gender identity. They would also support an annual Transgender Day of Remembrance.

DETAILS: Lee Rhiannon 0427 861 568, 9230 3551.

## **B. PEACE AND SECURITY**

### **MIDDLE EAST**

#### **UN RIGHTS COUNCIL RAPS ISRAEL OVER GAZA BLOCKADE**

The United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution Thursday that demands Israel lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip and rebukes the country for human rights violations. Supporters hope the move will increase international pressure on Israel to restore supplies of food, fuel and medicine to the area. [AlertNet.org/Reuters](http://AlertNet.org/Reuters) (24/1/08).

#### **EGYPT 'WILL NOT FORCE PALESTINIANS BACK'**

Egypt has said it would not use force to send back Palestinians who crossed from the Gaza Strip in large numbers after parts of the border were breached, the BBC reported (23/1/08).

Foreign ministry spokesman Hossam Zaki said the border would be closed again when all the Palestinians had returned. ARTICLE: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7205668.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7205668.stm)

#### **HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN GAZA DIFFICULT: UN**

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip remained extremely difficult with Israeli authorities both easing and adding to the restrictions and measures on the transport of goods and people in and out of the area, the UN agency tasked with helping Palestinian refugees said (23/1/08).

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East ([UNRWA](http://www.unrwa.org)) reported that Israel had introduced new security measures – mainly for sugar and flour – that were hampering the delivery of aid in Gaza, where Israel has imposed tight restrictions on border crossings to try to force an end to the daily rocket and mortar attacks launched against Israeli residential areas by militants in Gaza.

UNRWA said it had been able to get in three truckloads of powdered milk that day, but had been hoping to get nine truckloads, while an expected truckload of medicines did not make it through. But the agency also noted that it had received materials that would allow it to continue its food distribution operations inside Gaza, where about 1.5 million people live in an area 25 miles long and no more than six miles wide.

In an opinion column in *The Guardian* newspaper in the UK (23/1/08), the UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd said, "Gaza is on the threshold of becoming the first territory to be intentionally reduced to a state of abject destitution."

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25388&Cr=palestin&Cr1=>

### **COLLECTIVE PENALTIES 'PROHIBITED UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW'**

Stressing the support of UN for the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians living in Gaza, B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told a [meeting](#) on the situation in the Middle East earlier that the crisis in Gaza and southern Israel had escalated dramatically in the past week.

"Israel must reconsider and cease its policy of pressuring the civilian population of Gaza for the unacceptable actions of militants," Mr Pascoe added. "Collective penalties... are prohibited under international law."

Acknowledging Israel's security concerns, condemning unreservedly the "totally unacceptable" rocket and mortar attacks launched by militants in Gaza, he also reminded Israel of its obligations under international humanitarian law to avoid endangering civilians in its military actions.

"I would also like to reiterate that the UN's basic principled opposition to extrajudicial killings is compounded by the frequency with which such operations are carried out in densely populated civilian areas," he said. The Under-Secretary-General said the upsurge in violence was undermining the prospects for the Annapolis process that is supposed to lead to a year of hope and opportunity for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr Pascoe said the work of UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Gaza "is one of the few things that stand between the current crisis conditions and an even more dramatic deterioration of the situation."

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25377&Cr=palestin&Cr1=>

### **AHMADINEJAD OVERRULED BY IRAN'S SUPREME LEADER**

Iran is having its coldest weather in years and parliament had ratified a law to release extra funds to supply gas to rural areas undergoing shortages, the BBC reported (21/1/08). But it appeared that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad refused to implement it, prompting the speaker to appeal to the supreme leader. A BBC correspondent says Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's action is a rare public humiliation for the president. DETAILS: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7201213.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7201213.stm)

## **AFRICA**

### **UN REPORTS 10 HACKED TO DEATH IN KENYA**

Deadly violence continued across parts of Kenya and the police presence remained heavy, the UN reported, as the country reeled from the crisis after last month's disputed election (21/1/08).

The bloodshed resulted in 10 people hacked to death in ethnic violence, mainly in Kericho, Nakuru, Nairobi and Mombasa, and houses torched, according to UN security officials.

UN human rights chief Louise Arbour voiced deep concern about the continued violence and reports of grave human rights abuses in Kenya, strongly denouncing inter-ethnic killings.

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25352&Cr=kenya&Cr1=>

### **ANNAN ARRIVES IN KENYA TO TRY TO RESOLVE CRISIS**

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is in Nairobi to try to negotiate an end to the country's political crisis. [Financial Times \(free registration\)](#) (23/1/08). The ABC reported (25/1/08) a first face-to-face meeting with the two leaders had been held.

### **DRC PEACE PACT SIGNED**

A peace pact has been signed in Goma in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo by the government and armed groups, the BBC reported (23/1/08).

The deal includes an immediate ceasefire and the deployment of UN peacekeepers in 13 key locations. It aims to end months of bloody conflict in the east which has driven almost 500,000 people from their homes. It offers an amnesty to General Nkunda and his forces but the rebels say its full implementation will depend on disarming of ethnic Hutu militia.

REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7204898.stm>

## **LATIN AMERICA**

### **COLUMBIA: 2,000 FLEE ARMED GROUPS**

Some 2,000 people have fled the countryside and taken refuge in cities and villages after receiving threats from irregular armed groups in the eastern Colombian region of Arauca, according to the UNHCR (22/1/08).

A UNHCR team reported that in some parts, especially around Tame, the countryside was almost empty after people fled in early January after rival irregular armed groups issued threats.

"We are caught up between two hard stones and whatever we do we end up in trouble," one farmer in a village near Tame said. "Some of them say we have to go, others say we must stay. We end up being friends neither with god, nor with the devil." The government and several NGOs report the killing of several community leaders. Others are said to have disappeared.

## **C. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES**

### **BAN DISMAYED OVER LACK OF PROGRESS ON ARMS TREATY**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on Wednesday he was troubled by the lack of progress on a treaty aimed at halting the spread of dangerous weapons across the globe and in outer space. A decade of negotiations has failed to produce a consensus at the Conference on Disarmament. [AlertNet.org/Reuters](#) (23/1/08) and UN Wire.

### **TRIBUTE TO COLLEAGUES KILLED IN ALGIERS**

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon honoured the 17 UN staff members who lost their lives in last month's terrorist attack in Algeria.

ARTICLE: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25379&Cr=algiers&Cr1=terror>

Related article: [Secretary-General to appoint independent panel to look into Algiers attack](#)

### **UN POWERS REACH AGREEMENT ON IRAN RESOLUTION**

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany reportedly reached agreement on Tuesday on text for a resolution containing new sanctions on Iran. The new proposed sanctions, said to be relatively mild, are a bid to increase pressure on Tehran to end its uranium enrichment efforts. [The New York Times](#) (23/1/08).

### **KARZAI 'MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO COMBAT TERRORISM'**

Afghanistan's president Hamid Karzai told over 2,000 participants at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Wednesday that more needed to be done to combat terrorism, VOA reported. "The terrorism we are fighting is a political mutant, a Frankenstein created through the folly of short-sighted policy for the reckless pursuit of misperceived interests," he said.

Former British prime minister Tony Blair, now a Middle East peace envoy, said it was imperative that the long conflict between Palestinians and Israelis be resolved. "In my view there is nothing more important to empower the modern and moderate voices and to disable the extremes than if we get peace between Israel and Palestine based on justice and fairness and democracy," he said. REPORT: <http://voanews.com/english/2008-01-23-voa68.cfm>

### **ECONOMIC TURMOIL OVERSHADOWS DAVOS PARTY**

Talk of a US recession dominated the Davos gathering of the world's political and business elite on Wednesday, with sharp criticism of the US Federal Reserve but disagreement over the dangers to the global economy. Faced with turmoil on global stock markets and plummeting confidence, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, attempted to reassure assembled delegates, AFP reported. "The US economy is resilient, its structure is sound, and its long-term economic fundamentals are healthy," she said.

REPORT: <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jxu0lyYN0GSbl6lEX811cw0FO7Q>

**WEF:** The World Economic Forum is a [Geneva](#)-based foundation whose annual meeting of top business leaders, national political leaders (presidents, prime ministers and others), and selected intellectuals and journalists is usually held in [Davos, Switzerland](#). According to Wikipedia, [NGO](#) leaders from groups such as [Amnesty International](#), [Transparency International](#), [Oxfam](#) and various UN organisations attend, as well as [trades union](#) leaders and religious leaders.

**WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM WEBSITE:** <http://www.weforum.org/en/index.htm>

## **D. HEALTH & MEANS**

### **UNICEF: CHILD MORTALITY RATES FALL, CHALLENGES REMAIN**

Almost 10 million children die every year before their fifth birthday, most from preventable causes, UNICEF said on Tuesday. The good news is that the global annual death toll is lower than ever before, but children in several regions - including Africa, South Asia and the Middle East - remained very vulnerable. Read UNICEF's [press release](#). [Reuters](#) (22/1/08) and UN Wire.

### **UNFAO CHIEF: FOOD PRICES TO KEEP SOARING**

The cooling of the economy in the US and around the world most likely would not stop the strong upward trend in food prices, UN Food and Agriculture Organisation chief Jacques Diouf said on Thursday. The underlying factors that pushed up food prices recently, including population growth and biofuels demand, remained steadfast, Diouf told Reuters at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. [Reuters](#) (24/1/08).

### **WHO CREATES PUBLIC DATABASE ON BIRD FLU**

The World Health Organisation has set up a new database to track bird flu virus samples from around the world and allow sharing of the information. The WHO has launched the system on its website, although it will continue to be developed. Access it [here](#). [The Wall Street Journal](#) (subscription required) (24/1/08).

## **MIDDLE EAST**

### **HIV 'OUTPACES WHO ABILITY'**

New estimates from UNAIDS and WHO indicated that global HIV incidence had peaked in the late 1990s, Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organisation, said in a report to the Executive Board, 122nd session.

Evidence suggested that preventive efforts and the expansion of coverage with antiretroviral therapy contributed to these trends, but there was still a long way from the goal of universal access.

"The yearly number of new infections outpaces our ability to expand access to treatment. We are not doing enough to prevent mother-to-child transmission. Some governments are still closing their eyes to infections in high-risk groups," she said.

The global annual incidence of TB disease appeared to have stabilised in some parts of the world and might now be declining. However, the multi-drug resistant TB was a cause of particular concern, especially in Eastern Europe, parts of Central Asia, and China. Even more alarming was the recent emergence of extensively drug-resistant TB worldwide.

Both of these high-mortality diseases now imposed their greatest burden on Africa, she said. The political and public profile of malaria "has risen to unprecedented heights. I see solid reasons for optimism in the strength of international commitment, in the power of existing interventions, and in the coherence of evidence-based strategies for implementation.

"But the best reason for optimism comes from the results we are seeing in some African countries, particularly following better coverage with bed nets and use of the newer strategy for home-based management. New tools, most notably a vaccine, would allow us to raise the bar of expectations, but we are already seeing solid progress using existing tools."

DETAILS: [http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2008/20080121\\_eb/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2008/20080121_eb/en/index.html)

## ASIA

### **WHO WARNS OF 'SERIOUS' BIRD FLU THREAT IN INDIA**

A new outbreak of bird flu in India's West Bengal state has spread to several districts, prompting authorities to kill hundreds of thousands of chickens. No human cases of the disease have been reported, but the situation is "serious," a WHO representative said. [Bloomberg](#) (23/1/08).

## AFRICA

### **WFP DISTRIBUTES FOOD IN KENYA**

Kenyan partners have distributed food assistance from the UN World Food Program and the Kenyan Government for nearly 77,000 people in Nairobi's slums hit by post-election violence(15/1/08). WFP food was also given to 2,000 Kenyans who fled to Uganda.

The second distribution in four Nairobi slums within a week reached an estimated 76,800 people. The government provided cereals to the Kenya Red Cross (KRC) and WFP gave the pulses, high energy biscuits, vegetable oil and corn-soya blend for a full food basket. The distributions of one-week rations took place in Kibera, Mathare, Dandora and Korogocho slums.

DETAILS: <http://www.wfp.org/english/?ModuleID=137&Key=2741>

### **WFP: HIJACKINGS THREATEN DARFUR FOOD AID**

The World Food Program warned on Wednesday that a soaring number of truck hijackings in Darfur seriously threatened food aid for more than 2 million people in the war-scarred Sudanese region. So far this month, 22 WFP vehicles have been attacked and stolen, and 18 drivers were currently missing. [CNN/Associated Press](#) (23/1/08).

## ASIA PACIFIC

### **AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE INCREASE**

The number of Australian children in out-of-home care has increased by 51 per cent since 2002, according to a report released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

The report, *Child Protection Australia 2006-07*, showed that nationally, there were 18,880 children in out-of-home care in 2002, increasing to 28,441 children in 2007. Similarly, the number of children on care and protection orders increased significantly, rising by 43 per cent from 20,557 to 29,406 over the same period.

The majority of children in care were either in foster care (50%) or living with relatives (44%), with only 4 per cent of children in residential care in 2007.

Of all child protection notifications received in 2006-07, 58,563 were substantiated cases - cases where there was reasonable cause to believe that harm had occurred or would occur. This was an increase from the previous year, when there were 55,921 substantiated cases.

Although the quality of data on Indigenous status varied between states and territories, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were clearly over-represented in the child protection system, Unit Head Cynthia Kim said.

DETAILS: Cynthia Kim on 02 6244 1213 or 0417 711 607. REPORT COPIES: Publications Officer, AIHW on 61 2 6244 1032 or check AIHW Publications Catalogue: [Child Protection Australia 2006-07](#).

## **E. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENT**

### **RURAL PEOPLE 'FACE ADVERSE HEALTH EFFECTS'**

The National Rural Health Alliance says global warming will have adverse health effects on people living in rural Australia, the ABC reported (23/1/08). A research paper released by the University of Adelaide says increased temperatures, irregular rain and air pollution will have severe impacts. ARTICLE: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/01/23/2144795.htm>

### **COURT DECISION ON WHALING GOES TO TOKYO OFFICE**

Conservation group Humane Society International hand-delivered last week's Australian Federal Court order to a Japanese whaling company in Tokyo, the ABC reported on Wednesday. The judgment demands it abandon its whale hunt in Australian waters after the court found that more than 1,000 whales had been slaughtered in Australian waters over seven years. ARTICLE: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/01/23/2144854.htm>

### **JAPANESE PM DEFENDS WHALE HUNT**

Speaking to the BBC, PM Yasuo Fukuda said he was aware of opposition to what Japan calls its "scientific whaling", but said Japan was not breaking any laws, the BBC reported (24/1/08). The whaling fleet plans to kill about 1,000 whales in this year's cull. ARTICLE: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7206134.stm>

### **CHINA UNVEILS WATER PROTECTION, CLEAN-UP PLAN**

Chinese officials announced an ambitious plan on Tuesday to limit pollution of the country's lakes by 2010 and restore the water bodies to their original clean state by 2030. The plan will see increased regulation of wastewater disposal, closure of factories and improvement of sewage treatment facilities. [The New York Times](#) (23/1/08) and UN Wire.

### **EU ANNOUNCES MANDATORY EMISSIONS REDUCTION PLAN**

European Union officials unveiled plans on Wednesday to cut greenhouse gas emissions by one-fifth by 2020. The plans include targets for reducing industrial emissions and boosting renewable energy. [AlertNet.org/Reuters](#) (23/1/08) and UN Wire.

## **EUROPE GRAPPLES WITH BIOFUEL, SUSTAINABILITY EQUATION**

European governments have begun to scale back their investments and subsidies for biofuel production over concerns the alternative energy is not being produced in environmentally friendly ways. [The New York Times](#) (22/1/08) and UN Wire.

## **F. OTHER NEWS**

### **VISA RESTRICTIONS ON SOLOMONS LIFTED**

Visa restrictions for Solomon Islands MPs who seek to travel to, or transit through, Australia have been lifted, Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith announced. The visa restrictions were imposed in 2006.

He said the Federal Government looked forward to working closely with the new Solomon Islands Government under Prime Minister Sikua's leadership and saw the opportunity for a fresh start.

"Australia is committed to assisting the Solomon Islands, through RAMSI and our bilateral aid program, to build a prosperous and sustainable future for the Solomon Islands," the minister said. DETAILS: Foreign Minister's office on 02 6277 7500 or department on 02 6261 1555.

### **WTO Doha IMPORTANCE STRESSED IN INDIA**

A key aspect of Trade Minister Crean's visit to India was to convey to Indian ministers and the business community that Australia placed high priority on bringing the WTO Doha round of trade negotiations to a successful conclusion. This included agriculture, manufacturing and services, a Federal Government media release stated.

Given the increasingly important strategic and economic role India was now playing in the region, Mr Crean advised that Australia would actively work for India to be invited to become a member of APEC. Both ministers also looked forward to work commencing on a Free Trade Agreement study between Australia and India, and to the next Australia-India Joint Ministerial Commission meeting to be hosted by Australia, he said.

Mr Crean registered Australia's concerns at India's freight subsidies for sugar exports, urged the implementation of the mining reforms recommended by the Hoda Committee and the continuation of India's financial sector reform program. He also highlighted the importance of concerted action by the international community to address the challenges posed by climate change. In New Delhi he opened the new Australian High Commission Chancery.

DETAILS: Trade Minister's office on 02 6277 7420 or department on 02 6261 1555.

## **SPORTS HELP REFUGEE CHILDREN DEAL**

UNHCR and Spanish Primera Liga giants Barcelona on Tuesday signed a partnership agreement aimed at using sports to provide refugee children with life skills (22/1/08).

The three-year agreement, signed by Geneva by UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres and Futbol Club (FC) Barcelona President Joan Laporta, is expected to herald a long-term cooperation between the two famous and influential institutions.

"As a football club, our most important assets are our football stars. They are the ones who can give that touch of happiness to the most vulnerable people," said Ms Laporta, whose football club includes global stars such as Ronaldinho, Thierry Henry and Lionel Messi.

The main objective of the new partnership is to raise public awareness of the protection needs of refugees and other uprooted people around the world and to promote the role of education and sport in the development and well-being of refugees, particularly children.

As a first step, UNHCR and FC Barcelona will jointly identify and design a number of education and life skills projects through sport activities which will benefit refugees in Ecuador, Nepal and Rwanda. DETAILS: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/47961e1e2.html>

**UNICEF SPOKESMAN BECKHAM VISITS CHILDREN IN SIERRA LEONE:** Soccer star David Beckham, a UNICEF ambassador, is touring Sierra Leone, the country with the highest child mortality rate in the world. Hoping to bring attention to these children and others in similar situation, Beckham - among other things - visited a feeding centre and kicked a ball around with local kids. [The Independent \(London\)](#) (23/1/08).

**UN PEACEKEEPING ADVOCATE GEORGE CLOONEY ARRIVES IN CHAD:** George Clooney travelled to Chad on Tuesday as a UN "messenger of peace" after spending time in Sudan's troubled Darfur region, UN sources said. Clooney, appointed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to promote UN peacekeeping efforts, had been in Darfur for two days. The actor's outspoken views on the conflict, which he has called genocide, prompted the UN to keep his visit low-key. [AlertNet.org/Reuters](#) (22/1/08).

#### **THAI RETURN TO DEMOCRACY WELCOMED**

The return to parliamentary democracy in Thailand has been welcomed by Foreign Minister Stephen Smith. The elected Thai Parliament convened on January 21 following peaceful and orderly elections in December. He said the Australian Government looked forward to working closely and cooperatively with the newly-elected government, including in areas of trade and investment, law enforcement, defence, counter-terrorism, education, security, migration and tourism (22/1/08).

DETAILS: Foreign Minister's office on 02 6277 7500 or department on 02 6261 1555.

#### **FOREIGN MINISTER IN UNITED STATES AND JAPAN**

Foreign Minister Stephen Smith, travelling to the US and Japan (Jan 24-Feb 2) planned to take forward three key elements of Australian foreign policy – alliance with the US, UN membership and engagement with the Asia-Pacific.

He expected to discuss global and regional security challenges which Australia shares with the US (23/1/08). At the United Nations in New York, he planned to underline Australia's priorities, including the UN presence in East Timor, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UN involvement in Burma (Myanmar), climate change, peacekeeping and disarmament.

In Japan he was scheduled to meet senior Japanese Government ministers, politicians and foreign policy commentators to discuss enhancing economic links, including through achieving a high-quality Free Trade Agreement, as well as expanding strategic cooperation under the 2007 Australia-Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation.

DETAILS: Foreign Minister's office on 02 6277 7500 or department on 02 6261 1555.

#### **BANGLADESH TO RECEIVE \$6.5M**

Australia is to provide \$6.5 million to help Bangladeshi recover from Cyclone Sidr, which caused widespread devastation in November. The cyclone affected nearly nine million people and latest reports indicate more than 3,300 died and over 800 remain missing.

DETAILS: <http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s082301.html>

#### **AMBASSADOR TO AFGHANISTAN**

Martin Quinn will be Australia's new ambassador to Afghanistan and is expected to take up his appointment in March. Mr Quinn is a career foreign service officer and is currently Counsellor (Political) at the Australian Embassy, Seoul. He has also served in Jakarta and Bangkok

DETAILS: Foreign Minister's office on 02 6277 7500 or department on 02 6261 1555.

## **AMBASSADOR TO THE PHILIPPINES**

The new Australian ambassador to the Republic of the Philippines will be Rod Smith, who is expected to take up his appointment in March. Rod Smith is a senior career officer with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. He has served as Counsellor, Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York and in Seoul. He was formerly director, APEC Trade Facilitation Section (1995-98) and director, Nuclear Affairs Section.

DETAILS: Foreign Minister's office on 02 6277 7500 or department on 02 6261 1555.

## **G. MEDIA MATTERS**

**PHILIPPINES:** Journalists and media technicians are filing a petition calling for government protection after they were arrested and detained on November 29 while covering the takeover of the Peninsula Hotel, Manila, by rebel army soldiers. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) supports the move. The government said that the arrest of 11 journalists were to ensure rebel troops did not slip away, but police confiscated some journalists' video footage. The head of ABS-CBN news and current affairs, Maria Ressa, said that ABS-CBN, which had the most employees arrested, "can't stand by and watch a kind of creeping censorship test and weaken our democracy". DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +61 2 9333 0919.

**NEPAL:** The hand of a freelance journalist, Manoj Sah, was cut off in a brutal attack in eastern Nepal, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) reported (23/1/08). Mr Sah, who reportedly is linked with the Maoist-allied Revolutionary Journalists' Association, was said to have been attacked as he returned home on January 17. Mr Sah was admitted to the Teaching Hospital, Kathmandu, with serious injuries to his hands and head but his condition is no longer considered life-threatening. The attack came while an international press freedom mission to Nepal, supported by the FNJ and including an IFJ representative, appealed directly to senior authorities to take tough action to protect journalists who faced increasing risks of violence in the lead-up to Constituent Assembly elections on April 10

**AFGHANISTAN:** The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has strongly condemned a death sentence handed out by a closed court in Balkh province on January 22 to Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh, 23, a journalist for the daily *Janan-e-Naw*. He was detained in Mazhar-e-Sharif on October 27 for reported insolence against Islam. He was sentenced to death for blasphemy after being accused of distributing articles and books that contained anti-Islamic sentiment. The AIJA reported Parvez was denied a lawyer (23/1/08). The court was reported as relying on judicial discretion under Article 130 of Afghanistan's Constitution. However, it was reported that Article 34 of the constitution was said to clearly defend freedom of expression rights, in line with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The IFJ called on Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai to overturn the sentence and ensure that Afghanistan's constitutional guarantee of free expression was upheld. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on + 61 2 9333 0919.

## **H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS**

### **STILL WRONG IN AFGHANISTAN**

"'I'm a spray man myself,' President Bush told government leaders and American counter-narcotics officials during his 2006 trip to Afghanistan," writes Richard Holbrooke in the Washington Post (23/1/08). "He said it again when President Hamid Karzai visited Camp David in August. Bush meant, of course, that he favours aerial eradication of poppy fields in Afghanistan, which supplies over 90 per cent of the world's heroin. His remarks - which, despite their flippant nature, were definitely not meant as a joke - are part of the story behind the spectacularly unsuccessful US counter-narcotics program in [Afghanistan](#)."

ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/22/AR2008012202617.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

### **IRAQ'S NEW LAW ON EX-BAATHISTS COULD BRING ANOTHER PURGE**

Maj. Gen. Hussein al-Awadi, a former official in [Saddam Hussein's Baath Party](#), became the commander of the Iraqi National Police despite a 2003 law barring the party from government, the Washington Post reported (23/1/08). But now, under new legislation promoted as way to return former Baathists to public life, the 56-year-old and thousands like him could be forced out of jobs they have been allowed to hold. More than a dozen Iraqi lawmakers, US officials and former Baathists have expressed concern that the law could set off a new purge of ex-Baathists, the opposite of US hopes for the legislation. ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/22/AR2008012203538.html?hpid=topnews>

### **WAR IN CONGO KILLS 45,000 PEOPLE EACH MONTH**

A decade of fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo is continuing to kill about 45,000 people each month - half of them small children - in the deadliest conflict since the WWII, according to a new survey. [The Guardian](#) reports that the International Rescue Committee said preventable diseases and starvation aggravated by conflict have claimed 5.4 million lives since the beginning of the second Congo war in 1998, equivalent to the population of Denmark. Although the war officially ended in 2002, malaria, diarrhoea, pneumonia and malnutrition continued to claim thousands of lives. ARTICLE: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/congo/story/0,,2245139,00.html>

### **RELIEVE BELCHING COWS AND SAVE THE PLANET**

Japanese researchers have stumbled on a way to stop cows from emitting methane - a potent greenhouse gas - when they belch, a finding that could help the fight against global warming, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (23/1/08). Methane generated when livestock belch while eating is said to account for about 5 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. But supplementing the animals' diet with cysteine, a type of amino acid, and nitrate can reduce the methane produced by the animals, Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine researchers say. ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/01/22/1200764263735.html>

### **AUSTRALIA AMONG WORST CLIMATE OFFENDERS**

Australia is one of the world's worst performing nations when it comes to addressing climate change, according to an annual ranking of 149 countries by researchers at US Yale and Columbia universities, reports the Sydney Morning Herald (24/1/08). ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/01/23/1201024993026.html>

## **I. UNity, UN AND UNAA CONTACTS**

To access major United Nations websites, go to:

[United Nations.](#)

[Secretary-General.](#)

[UN News Centre.](#)

[Key UN Bodies, Agencies, Funds and Programs.](#)

[United Nations Information Centre for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific](#), Level 1, 7 National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600, Canberra or PO Box 5366, Kingston ACT 2604, and on 61 (2) 6273 8200.

The World Federation of United Nations is a global network of people linked through [United Nations Associations](#) in over 100 UN member states. Website available at <http://www.wfuna.org/who/> ; newsletter at <http://www.wfuna.org/news/newsletter/index.cfm>.

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to join UNAA, access <http://www.unaa.org.au/> or contact:

UNAA ACT [unaaact@cyberone.com.au](mailto:unaaact@cyberone.com.au) on 02 6247 4499.

UNAA NSW [office@unaansw.org.au](mailto:office@unaansw.org.au) 02 9212 0998; f 02 9280 0137.

UNAA Qld [unaabalmain@optusnet.com.au](mailto:unaabalmain@optusnet.com.au) on /fax 07 32541096.

UNAA SA [unaasa@picknowl.com.au](mailto:unaasa@picknowl.com.au) on 08 8226 4141.

UNAA Tas. [secretary@UNAATasmania.org](mailto:secretary@UNAATasmania.org) on 03 6229 4269 <http://www.unaatasmania.org/>.

UNAA Vic [info@unaavictoria.org.au](mailto:info@unaavictoria.org.au) on (03) 9670 7878 Website: <http://www.unaavictoria.org.au/>.

UNAA WA [unaawa@tpg.com.au](mailto:unaawa@tpg.com.au) on 08 9221 9455 <http://www.unaa-wa.org.au/>.

UNAA NT (Darwin) <http://au.f313.mail.yahoo.com/ym/Compose?To=fletch44@bigpond.net.au> or on 0419 829509.

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