

UNITY

THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

Compiled from Federal parliamentary and other sources relevant to Australia's obligations to the United Nations

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NOTE: This week UNity is on <http://www.unityunaa.blogspot.com/> The new website which is under construction is nearly completed. Reminder emails will contain both links in the transition period. Please note some links may need to be copied and pasted into the address space/browser.

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A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES

AUSTRALIA TO ENGAGE MORE WITH UN: SMITH

The Rudd Government wants Australia to engage with the United Nations far more than occurred under the Howard years, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said (5/2/08).

"We'd like to see a much greater and prominent role for the United Nations," Mr Smith told ABC TV, after returning from the US and Japan.

The United Nations should return centre stage to international global affairs. "We'd encourage that of the United States as we'd encourage that of ourselves," he said.

Mr Smith and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd were scheduled to meet with China's foreign minister Yang Jiechi on Wednesday - the most senior Chinese official to visit Australia since the change of government, the ABC reported.

PACIFIC SOLUTION ENDS

The previous federal government's so-called Pacific Solution officially ended on Friday ((8/2/08) with the last remaining refugees on Nauru leaving for Australia. Before the election the Federal Government pledged to end the policy of housing asylum seekers on Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island, but would expand a processing centre on Christmas Island.

The regional representative from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Richard Towle, said the agency was pleased to see the government act so quickly to wind up the Pacific Solution, the ABC reported.

"This is the end of a long and fairly painful chapter in Australian asylum policy and practice and we're delighted that Nauru finally will have no more refugees on it from now on," he said. But there would be careful monitoring of the processing centre remaining on Christmas Island.

OIL-FOR-FOOD FUNDS TRANSFERRED TO IRAQ DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a letter to the Security Council Monday that the world body has transferred \$161 million from the former oil-for-food program for Iraq to a development program for that country. The oil-for-food program, which was meant to help the Iraqi people while the country was under sanctions, ended operations in 2003 but still has hundreds of millions of dollars in outstanding credit. [Seattle Post-Intelligencer/Associated Press](#) (4/2/08).

UN SECURITY REVIEW TO BE LED BY ALGERIAN DIPLOMAT

Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi -- a former foreign minister who has worked as UN envoy in many trouble spots around the world -- will head the upcoming review of UN security, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said Tuesday. The panel that will conduct the review, which was initiated after the deadly bombings in Algiers that killed 17 UN staffers, will recommend ways to improve security for UN personnel around the world. [Reuters](#) (6/2/08).

UN REVIEWS IN CHAD, KENYA: UN officials are reviewing operations and security situations for the world body's workers in Kenya and Chad in the wake of growing violence there. [Inter Press Service](#) (5/2/08).

MIDDLE EAST

WORLD BANK WARNS ARAB EDUCATION LAGGING

Education in Arab countries is falling behind world standards and must be reformed to improve the region's economic development prospects, the World Bank warns in a new report. While Latin America and Asia have seen literacy and school enrollment rates rise, education in such countries as Djibouti, Iraq, Morocco and Yemen has not improved, the Bank said. [BBC](#) (5/2/08).

ASIA

[EAST TIMOR UN STARTS HANDING POWER TO LOCAL POLICE](#)

The UN, which took control of East Timor's local security operations two years ago amid escalating violence, has started transferring authority back to local police. Local officers are now responsible for three police posts in Dili - a small but important first step toward restoring the local police force's independence, UN special representative Atul Khare said. [BBC](#) (4/2/08).

CAMBODIA SURVIVORS LOOK FOR ANSWERS FROM TRIALS

Survivors of the Khmer Rouge's brutal 1975-1979 regime hope the United Nations-backed trials of former leaders now getting under way will, finally, bring some answers and justice. While the broad scope of the regime's violent ways is known, details of the horrific history are not widely understood, survivors say. [The Sun \(Baltimore\)](#) (free registration) (2/4)

[TAIWAN SCHEDULES REFERENDUMS ON UN MEMBERSHIP](#)

Taiwan's election committee said it will hold two referendums on March 22 on whether it should seek to join the United Nations. Taiwan has already tried to join the world body several times but was blocked amid opposition from China. [BBC](#) (1/2/08).

The commission's secretary-general, Teng Tien-yu, said the votes would be held on March 22 is also the day for the presidential election, the BBC reported (1/2/08).

The two referendums have been proposed by the ruling Democratic Progressive Party and the opposition Kuomintang.

Taiwan lost its seat to China in 1971 which has claimed sovereignty over Taiwan since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949, when the defeated Nationalist government fled to the island as the Communist Party swept to power.

Mr Teng said the DPP-proposed referendum next month would ask whether voters "agree that the government should seek to join the UN in the name of Taiwan to express Taiwanese people's will and enhance Taiwan's international status".

"From the perspective of the United States, the conduct of such a referendum is a mistake," US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte said last month. "We think it is a provocative policy on the part of the Taiwanese authorities and we think that it certainly would have been preferable had not such a referendum been scheduled," he added.

China has offered a 'one country, two systems' solution, like Hong Kong but most people in Taiwan support the status quo, it was reported.

REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7222531.stm>

AFRICA

The Security Council demanded on Monday that Eritrea, which says UN peacekeepers have no right to remain on its border with Ethiopia, immediately allow struggling UN personnel access to fuel, Reuters reported (5/2/08).

Last week the council renewed the mandate of the U.N. Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, or UNMEE, for six months and urged Eritrea to end its fuel blockade of U.N. staff. Eritrea, which contends that a continued U.N. presence on the border would be tantamount to an occupation, ignored the demand, prompting Monday's warning from the council.

"The members of the Security Council reiterate their firm and unwavering demand that Eritrea (immediately) ... lift its restrictions on fuel deliveries so that UNMEE will be in a position to execute its extended mandate," the council said in a non-binding statement.

It made no mention of possible consequences if Eritrea refuses to comply.

Eritrea cut off fuel supplies to UNMEE troops on its side of the border in December, forcing them to drastically reduce patrols and demining activities.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon wrote on Friday to the current council president, Panamanian U.N. Ambassador Ricardo Alberto Arias, warning him that UNMEE faces a "fuel crisis."

Ban said if the fuel blockade was not over by Wednesday, he would begin moving UNMEE staff out of Eritrea.

Arias told reporters he wanted to meet with the Eritrean ambassador to discuss the situation and declined to speculate on steps the council might take if Eritrea remains defiant.

The 1,700-member United Nations force went to the border in 2000 at the end of a two-year war between the two countries in the Horn of Africa that killed 70,000 people.

An independent commission charged with marking the border after the war awarded the flashpoint town of Badme to Eritrea in 2002, but Ethiopia did not withdraw. In November, the commission demarcated the line by map coordinates in a ruling that Eritrea accepted but Ethiopia rejected.

INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

Crisis Group Weekly Update

CrisisWatch N°54 Seven actual or potential conflict situations around the world deteriorated in January 2008, according to the new issue of *CrisisWatch* (1/2/08).

REPORT: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5276&l=1>

CONTACTS: Andrew Stroehlein (Brussels) 32 2 541 16 35;

Kimberly Abbott (Washington) 1 202 785 1609;

Crisis Group's Media Unit [click here](#) and <http://www.crisisgroup.org>

OTHER REPORTS see UNity Supplement.

B. CLIMATE CHANGE

MEDIUM-TERM EMISSIONS TRAJECTORY BY END OF 2008: WONG

The Federal Government had made a commitment that the emissions trading scheme would commence in 2010 and the design of the scheme must be finalised at the end of this year, Senator Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change and Water, told the Australian Industry Group in Melbourne on Wednesday.

She said the government intended to move quickly to provide signals to investors and the community and would announce a firm indication of the planned medium-term emissions trajectory by the end of this year. It would also move to develop an exposure draft on emissions trading legislation, also by the end of the year, to enable passage of legislation in 2009 and facilitate the commencement of the scheme in 2010, she said.

BAN WARNS WATER SHORTAGES 'ARE INCREASINGLY DRIVING CONFLICTS'

Many of today's conflicts around the world were being fuelled or exacerbated by water shortages and climate change was only making the situation worse, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told the General Assembly (6/2/08).

"I find this trend deeply worrying, especially because such shortages are only projected to grow in coming years." Water also underpinned many of the world's key development challenges – food, the environment, health and economic well-being. International cooperation was crucial to overcoming the problem, he said, calling for governments, business and civil society to form new and innovative partnerships. DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/News>

CROP LOSSES IN SOUTH ASIA AND SOUTHERN AFRICA PREDICTED

Climate change could cause severe crop losses in South Asia and southern Africa over the next 20 years, a study in the journal *Science* says. The findings suggest southern Africa could lose more than 30 per cent of its main crop, maize, by 2030. In South Asia losses of many regional staples, such as rice, millet and maize could top 10 per cent, the report says. The effects in these two regions could be catastrophic without effective measures to adapt to climate change, the BBC reported (1/2/08). DETAILS: Prioritising Climate Change Adaptation Needs for Food Security in 2030: <http://www.sciencemag.org/>

UN URGES INDIA TO LOOK FOR GREEN

India should look for areas within its growing economy where green technology can be applied, says Yvo de Boer, UN executive secretary on climate change. India has publicly committed itself to slashing its greenhouse gas emissions 25 per cent 2020: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SP233316.htm> (6/2/08).

LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN 'HAVE KEY ROLE IN GLOBAL FIGHT'

As secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Yvo de Boer said Latin American and Caribbean countries would play a key role in designing an international post-2012 climate change agreement and be among the countries likely most to benefit (1/2/08).

"As part of the initial phase of international climate change negotiations in 2008, there needs to be a focus on designing the mechanisms to support and enable action by developing countries, not least by countries in your region," he said, speaking to ministers at the 16th Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean (30/1 to 1/2/08). Latin American and Caribbean countries are regarded by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to be among those that will bear the brunt of climate change over the next decades. DETAILS: John Hay on +49 228 815 1404: <http://unfccc.int>

WORLD'S FORESTS UNDER ATTACK

Environmentalists have warned for decades that deforestation is a growing problem globally, and some experts say the situation is approaching the crisis point. The largest tracts of forested land are disappearing in South America, but the trend is worst in Africa, where almost one per cent of the trees are cut down or die out every year: <http://canadianpress.google.com/article/ALegM5ggsgsXc-FLgGsLpo3A27wqOAvw> (3/2/08).

REPORT ATTACKS RUDD CLIMATE POLICY

The Rudd Government's climate change policy has already been overtaken by new science and will impose a "death sentence" on Australia unless urgently updated, says a new report, according to the Canberra Times (2/2/08). Greens climate change spokesperson Senator Christine Milne said the survey of the latest climate science showed the Rudd Government's current direction left an "unacceptably high risk." (4/2/08).

DETAILS: Tim Hollo on 0437 587 562; timhollo@aph.gov.au REPORTS: <http://canberra.yourguide.com.au/news/local/general/report-attacks-climate-policy/1174418.html> FOE: <http://www.foe.org.au/media-releases/2007/climate-code-red-launched> Carbon Equity and the Greenleap Strategic Institute:

GM CROPS COSTLY, CANADIAN WARNS

Farmers who embrace genetically modified crops would become slaves to biotechnology companies, the vice-president of Canada's National Farmers Union has warned (6/2/08). Terry Boehm, a canola grower, said the introduction of genetically modified canola in Canada had impoverished farmers. Biotechnology companies charged farmers a high price. NSE and Victoria bans on growing modified canola end in a month. Mr Boehm said he had stockpiled conventional seed and did not have to deal with biotechnology companies.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/05/1202090421381.html>

C. PEACE & SECURITY

EAST TIMOR, UN AND FRETILIN DISCUSS SECURITY REFORM

Top officials from the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste met with the leadership of the former ruling party FRETILIN to discuss security sector reform (5/2/08). It was convened by the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Timor-Leste (East Timor), Atul Khare, to provide information to FRETILIN representatives and seek their views on UNMIT's role in the review and reform of key security institutions.

Mr Khare told the meeting that security sector reform was a priority area and its success was critical: "Any review on how to reform the security sector must look at the restructuring of the national police" and an assessment of the Timorese army (F-FDTL), the private security sector, customs and other institutional areas such as the courts and correctional facilities." The review must be comprehensive, holistic, ensure broad representation of all stakeholders and it must be owned by the Timorese people," he said.

The UN is hoping to help create a security sector that is effective, accountable, transparent, non-partisan and sustainable, operating under civilian control, within a framework of the rule of law and respect for human rights, UNMIT said in a news release.

FRETILIN officials had expressed willingness to become engaged in issues of national importance to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon when he visited Timor-Leste in December. This followed post-electoral violence in August, attributed in part to FRETILIN supporters that drove thousands from their homes in the South Asian country. Participants agreed to meet every two weeks. DETAILS: Mark Rohde email aetfa@westnet.com.au

CLUSTER MUNITIONS - NEW ACTION

Following the failure of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) to agree to urgent action to address the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions in November 2006, the Norwegian Government announced its intention to establish a new international process to develop a treaty to ban cluster bombs. The next meetings in the Oslo process are scheduled for Wellington, from February 18/22 and Dublin in May 19/30.

A Cluster Munition Coalition Australia (CMCA) was established on January 16 and its first public event will be a panel discussion on 'Towards a ban on cluster bombs' at the Theatre, NSW Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney, on February 15 at 5.15pm.

Sydney speakers include: Lou Maresca works in the Legal Division of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva and currently involved on behalf of ICRC in the Oslo Process negotiations; Rae McGrath, the International spokesperson on Cluster Munitions for the Handicap International Network and founding member of the Cluster Munitions Coalition; Archie Law is the deputy chief executive officer of Sydney-based development agency Austcare, a post-conflict specialist with extensive experience working for the UN including in Iraq (2002-2003), Mines Advisory Group in Cambodia (1998-2002), and World Vision Australia's Emergency Relief Unit (1995-1998); and Sara Sekkenes, program adviser for Mine Action at UNDP and deputy head of the Conflict Team at UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery. She formerly acted as policy adviser at Norwegian Peoples' Aid. DETAILS: amiddleton@austcare.org.au or +612 95659111.

NUCLEAR CONNECTIONS

This 32-minute film documents an 86 day Peace Walk from Dublin to London, talking to many people in Ireland, Scotland and England who have and are resisting the nuclear industry while creating a community of peaceful change. Nuclear Connections will be introduced by filmmakers

KA and Marcus who are currently planning another walk to commence in April from London to Geneva. DETAILS: www.footprintsforpeace.net; 0432 084 065; mka@footprintsforpeace.net

AUSTRALIA DISCUSSES AFGHANISTAN WITH NATO PARTNERS

Minister for Defence Joel Fitzgibbon has left for Vilnius, Lithuania to meet with his counterparts from other International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) contributing nations to discuss the future of Afghanistan (5/2/08), according to a Federal Government media release. The Regional Command (South) Ministerial meetings provide a platform to discuss issues concerning strategic and practical progress being made in southern Afghanistan.

DETAILS: Christian Taubenschlag (Joel Fitzgibbon) on 02 6277 7800 or 0438 595 567; Defence on 02 6265 3343 or 0408 498 664.

UN OFFICIAL CRITICISES US FOR DEFENDING WATER-BOARDING

The Bush administration's defence this week of the use of water-boarding, a very rough interrogation technique the CIA said it used in rare cases a few years ago, came under fire on Wednesday from the UN's top torture investigator as "absolutely unacceptable", the London Guardian reported (7/2/08): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/usa/story/0,,2253630,00.html>

FUNDS FOR OVERSEAS AID RESEARCH

As a first step to improve the effectiveness of Australia's overseas aid, the Australian Government is implementing an enhanced three-year development research strategy, Bob McMullan, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, said in a media release (29/1/08).

"It is not good enough to just increase the quantity of aid, although that is very important, we must increase the quality of the aid as well," he said. "Therefore, the Australian Government will provide \$8.8 million for 27 new Australian Development Research Awards. Good research leads to a more effective aid program. The research will provide decision-makers with practical solutions to the most difficult development challenges in the Asia-Pacific region."

The inaugural round of the Australian Development Research Awards will fund 27 research proposals including seven proposals from overseas-based institutions.

DETAILS: LS: Sabina Curatolo (Minister's Office) on 0400 318 205; AusAID Public Affairs on 0417 680 590; AETFA(SA) at <http://www.bigbutton.com.au/~winroh/aetfa/>

AFRICA

UN CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL HELP

The UN Security Council unanimously adopted a statement on Monday calling on the international community to help stop the violence in Chad, the New York Times reported. (5/2/08). At least 100 civilians were killed in last weekend's fighting between rebels and government forces in Chad, according to aid agencies, the BBC reported (6/2/08). Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said up to 700 were wounded in the capital N'Djamena during the attempted coup. The Red Cross estimate was higher and the death toll was expected to rise as aid workers continued to collect dead bodies left on the streets. DETAILS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7231627.stm>

UN TOP RIGHTS CHIEF URGES PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN WAR-TORN CHAD

The Security Council has demanded an immediate end to the violence engulfing Chad and welcomed an African Union initiative to try to engage both the government and the armed opposition groups to find a durable solution to the country's crisis.

The condemnation of the armed groups' recent attacks against the government came as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was expressing alarm at the deteriorating situation, especially its impact on Chad's large population of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). A team

from the UN refugee agency departed for the Chadian border with Cameroon to help thousands of residents of the capital, N'Djamena, who have been fleeing the fighting.

"The Security Council strongly condemns these attacks and all attempts at destabilisation by force, and recalls its commitment to the sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and political independence of Chad," the 15-member panel said in a presidential statement read out by Ambassador Ricardo Alberto Arias of Panama. It urged all states within the region, "to deepen their cooperation with a view to putting an end to the activities of armed groups and their attempt to seize power by force" and to provide support to the Chadian Government if it seeks assistance. ARTICLE: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25495&Cr=chad&Cr1=>

TOP UN HUMANITARIAN OFFICIAL FOR KENYA

Kenya has reached the tragic milestone of 1,000 people killed in post-election violence, as talks led by former UN chief Kofi Annan continued to try to reach a political solution, (5/2/08). DETAILS: <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/africa/02/05/kenya.death toll/index.html>

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is dispatching his top humanitarian official to Kenya, where more than 300,000 people have been forced to flee their homes due to violence which has torn through the East African nation following last December's disputed elections (5/2/08).

"With our partners, we have been able to meet the initial basic needs of displaced populations, totalling around 310,000 IDPs [internally displaced persons] spread over 192 sites in the western and central provinces," Mr Ban said, after briefing a closed meeting of the Security Council on his recent visit to Africa. "I am going to dispatch Mr John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to look after these issues."

During a visit to Africa, Mr Ban met with both President Mwai Kibaki and Opposition leader Raila Odinga, telling both men that "they bear a particular political responsibility for the future of Kenya." REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25517&Cr=kenya&Cr1>

MIDDLE EAST

WINOGRAD COMMISSION "DISREGARDS ISRAELI WAR CRIMES"

Amnesty International has called a report published by the Winograd Commission on Israel's conduct in the war with Hezbollah in July-August 2006 "deeply flawed." The organisation said that the report failed to investigate a crucial aspect of the war - the government policies and military strategies that failed to discriminate between the Lebanese civilian population and Hezbollah combatants and between civilian property and infrastructure and military targets. REPORT: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/israel-winograd-commission-disregards-israeli-war-crimes-20080131>

SOUTH AMERICA

MILLIONS DEMONSTRATE FOR END TO COLOMBIA KIDNAPPINGS

Millions in Colombia and around the world marched on Monday against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, demanding FARC rebels halt kidnappings and murders, and release all hostages (5/2/08). REPORT: <http://www.miamiherald.com/579/story/406505.html>

D. HUMAN RIGHTS

APOLOGY: RUDD RULES OUT COMPENSATION

Kevin Rudd revealed details of an official apology to the Stolen Generation confirming it will be on behalf of the Parliament, not the government, in an attempt to secure bipartisan support, the

Australian reported (6/2/08). The prime minister also confirmed the apology would explicitly exclude a commitment on financial compensation. The Opposition later agreed in principle to support an apology.

The apology will be on behalf of the Parliament of Australia rather than the government if it is likely to receive bipartisan support, according to the PM's statement. It would recognise past mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and include a commitment that the parliament would act to ensure past wrongs were not repeated.

ARTICLE: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23169028-2702,00.html>

The Australian Greens indicated they would support an unreserved apology to the stolen generations, and criticised the Federal Government for moving with "undue haste" to rule out reparations (1/2/08). Bob Brown gave the Australian Greens' unreserved apology in the Senate in 1997, a media release stated. DETAILS: Chris Twomey on 0407 725 025;

senator.siewert@aph.gov.au and <http://www.rachelsiewert.org.au>

CONVERGENCE ON CANBERRA

A delegation of Aboriginal people from Central Australia is expected to join with people from all around the country for the opening of Federal Parliament on February 12.

The nationally organised 'Convergence on Canberra' is calling for an immediate review of the NT Intervention, restoration of the Racial Discrimination Act, Aboriginal control of Aboriginal affairs, as well as implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples:

wgr.news@gmail.com

The convergence on Canberra will take place on Tuesday, February 12, meeting at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy at 11:30am to march to Parliament for 1pm.

DETAILS: [Aboriginal Rights Coalition website](#).

HREOC BRINGING THEM HOME RESOURCES

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) has produced a range of resources for the community, schools, journalists and historians, supporting the 1997 HREOC *Bringing them home* report.

DETAILS: www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/bth_report/

Bringing them home resources can be ordered on 02 9284 9600 or online at www.humanrights.gov.au/about/publications/

MP BACKS REMOVAL OF SOME INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

A newly-elected federal Liberal MP says circumstances still exist for some Indigenous children to be taken from their parents, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (6/2/08).

Luke Simpkins, who won the WA seat of Cowan from the ALP in November, was responding to questions about the Rudd Government's planned apology.

"The sad reality is that there are places around this country right now - whether it's suburbs or whether it's communities - where I think kids should be taken from their parents because of drugs and things like that," Mr Simpkins said on Wednesday. ARTICLE:

<http://news.smh.com.au/mps-back-removal-of-some-indigenous-kids/20080206-1qgp.html>

INDIGENOUS HEALTH SERVICE CELEBRATES AWARD

The achievements of the staff of Canberra's Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service have been marked by a LIMELight award (2/2/08).

The award was given for 'Leading Innovation in Community Engagement'. The staff was nominated by the ANU Medical School Rural Clinical School in recognition of its contribution to teaching medical students. LIMELight awards are given annually by The LIME Network (Leaders

in Indigenous Medical Education) in recognition of initiatives that address critical issues in Aboriginal health.

DETAILS: Associate Professor Amanda Barnard on 02 6125 1419 / 0414 185 207 and Martyn Pearce, ANU Media Office on 02 6125 5575 / 0416 249 245; www.anu.edu.au/media

AUSTRALIA'S 'SOCIAL CLIMATE CURRENTLY AT A CROSSROADS'

The Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA) has welcomed the Federal Government's initiative of the 2020 Summit to shape the nation's future and called for the gathering to truly reflect Australia's diverse communities (5/2/08).

FECCA chair person Voula Messimeri said it was an opportunity for the new government to take the lead in recommitting to multiculturalism, saying a policy that addresses social cohesion and proactively manages Australia's great cultural and social diversity was needed.

"The social climate of Australia is currently at a crossroads. We must act now before we experience a crisis on a par with our environmental crisis. Let's learn from our hesitancy over climate change issues where too little was done for too long.

"Multiculturalism must be re-adopted as the positive way forward. Australia, which has a diverse social reality, must have a strong, well thought-out multicultural policy in order to achieve social cohesion," she said.

FECCA applauded the government's move to work towards this through its apology to the Stolen Generation and called for the government to work with Indigenous communities towards sustainable solutions.

"Social justice in health, housing, employment and education need innovation and systematic implementation for real change to occur. Sustainable solutions need to be embraced as part of an overarching policy of social cohesion. A multicultural policy that proactively manages our social diversity and ensures inclusive practice as the social norm will benefit all Australians," she said.

DETAILS: Voula Messimeri, FECCA chair on 0414 532 529 or 02 6282 5755.

VISAS FOR AFGHAN ASYLUM SEEKERS

Asylum seeker activists were delighted this week to hear that Australian Immigration authorities in Islamabad were reported to be processing the Off shore Humanitarian visa application for a family of nine from Lombok, urgently at a request from Canberra.

UNity reported last week that the Afghan asylum seekers, including children, had been waiting six years for protection, according to Pamela Curr, Campaign Coordinator, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC). They had been held in Indonesia since 2001.

Pamela Curr had requested readers to write to Senator Chris Evans saying the asylum seekers should have a chance to live in Australia.

DETENTION IN NAURU TO END

The announcement that the last detainees from the immigration detention centre on the Pacific island of Nauru would be brought to Australia won praise for the Federal Government from Human Rights Commissioner Graeme Innes (5/2/08).

"The closure of Nauru and settlement of its last detainees – 21 Sri Lankan men - in Australia is an important moment that ends a sad period in Australia's history," said Commissioner Innes said.

"This is an important step which demonstrates a degree of compassion while maintaining strong border protection."

SPY 'GOVERNMENT WARNED OVER HABIB'

An ASIO agent has undermined the Howard Government's claims that it did not know anything about former Guantanamo Bay inmate Mamdouh Habib's rendition to Egypt, saying the possibility that the Sydney man might be sent there was discussed from the time the spy agency knew he had been detained in Pakistan, The Australian reported (2/2/08).

The spy, using the pseudonym 'Paul Stokes', told a Federal Court hearing that what might happen to Mr Habib was discussed with government officials from the beginning of his detention in October 2001.

It was reported as the first time an Australian government official had admitted knowing anything about the possibility that Mr Habib might be taken to Egypt before he was sent there in November 2001. Mr Habib is suing the Federal Government.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0.25197.23146956-5013404.00.html>

BARRISTER CLEARED OF MISCONDUCT

Stephen Keim, barrister to former terrorism suspect Dr Mohammed Haneef, has been cleared of professional misconduct by Queensland's Legal Services Commissioner for releasing a transcript of Dr Haneef's interview with the Australian Federal Police, the Brisbane Times reported.(1/2/08).

Mr Keim has been informed there would be no further investigation and there had been no act of professional misconduct in his decision to release a transcript to the media.

The release of the transcript played a crucial part in exposing the inadequacies of the Crown's case against Dr Haneef and charges were eventually dropped, it was reported. ARTICLE:

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/news/queensland/haneefs-lawyer-cleared-over-leak/2008/02/01/1201801009758.html>

BROWN FLAGS EUTHANASIA BILL

Greens leader Bob Brown has written to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd seeking a conscience vote on voluntary euthanasia legislation, Rights of the Terminally Ill Bill 2008, which Senator Brown will introduce in the Senate next week.

"My Bill will restore the legitimacy of the Northern Territory legislation allowing voluntary euthanasia for terminally ill patients after rigorous conditions have been applied," he said (5/2/08). The Bill will effectively support the Australian Capital Territory to legislate for voluntary euthanasia as well," he said.

"Every opinion poll since the 1980s has shown that the vast majority of Australians back voluntary euthanasia legislation along the lines of that in the Netherlands and Oregon," he said.

DETAILS: Ebony Bennett on 0409 164 603.

EQUALITY FOR GAY EMPLOYEES

Technology and consultancy company IBM has been congratulated by Human Rights Commissioner Graeme Innes for its commitment to equality by providing its gay and lesbian employees with the same benefits and entitlements available to heterosexual employees.

The commissioner was speaking to the Rainbow Conversations Conference on gay, lesbian, transgender and intersex human rights in the Asia Pacific region in Melbourne (31/1/08), for which IBM was a conference partner. The conference is part of the 1st Asia Pacific Out Games for which IBM is also a major sponsor.

HREOC had found 58 pieces of federal legislation which discriminated against same-sex couples regarding financial and work-related entitlements and remained in discussions with the new federal attorney-general about the laws and when they would be amended. The Opposition was also now committed to supporting the removal of discrimination, he said.

Mr Innes later congratulated the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government on its intention to legislate to allow both partners in a same-sex relationship to access parental leave (5/2/08). He said the ACT Government should be applauded for its vigilance in removing discrimination against same-sex couples from its own laws.

REPORT: www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/samesex/index.html

US EXPANDS SANCTIONS AGAINST MYANMAR

The US said on Tuesday it was slapping more financial sanctions on Myanmar over concerns that the military regime is planning secret trials for pro-democracy activists. Eleven activists who were arrested by the junta amid peaceful protests last year, including Buddhist monk U Gambira, now face secret trials, the US. said. [Bloomberg](#) (5/2/08).

UN COMMITTEE SLAMS SAUDI WOMEN'S LACK OF RIGHTS

Saudi Arabian women suffer from a severe lack of rights across all aspects of society, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reported, according to AFP. The Saudi Government needed to act to boost women's rights and rein in violence against them.

Saudi Arabia is governed by Wahabism, a strict interpretation of Islam that - in the name of Sharia law - imposes almost complete separation of the sexes. As such, it is illegal for a woman to be in the company of a man who is not in her immediate family.

A Saudi delegation earlier told the committee in Geneva that "Saudi society is still largely a tribal society and changes in mentality allowing new ideas to be accepted take time". Riyadh also claimed that "Islam, as a realistic religion, admits that total equality between man and woman is contrary to reality, as various scientific studies on their psychological differences have shown".

The committee said women suffered from domestic violence, poor health care provision and high levels of illiteracy. Female domestic migrant workers were vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation with no ready access to the law. REPORT: [Google/Agence France-Presse](#) (2/2/08).

STRIP-SEARCHED FOR MEETING MAN IN CAFE

A businesswoman was detained and strip-searched by Saudi Arabia's religious police for sitting in a Starbucks coffee shop with an unrelated man, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (6/2/08).

This was soon after a UN report criticised the kingdom for widespread discrimination against women and as a UN expert on women's rights began a visit to the country. Also at the time, a Saudi princess announced a scholarship to promote women in journalism, saying they were "best placed to promote cultural communication between men and women in Saudi society".

The English-language Arab News quoted a 40-year-old financial consultant was arrested by the powerful Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice while holding a business meeting with the man in a Riyadh cafe in a section reserved for families. Saudi law requires that unrelated men and women be segregated in public. She was later released but the man with whom she had coffee, an unnamed Syrian financial analyst, was reported to be still in custody.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/06/1202233870704.html>

THOUSANDS PROTEST PLAN TO SCRAP TURKEY HEADSCARF BAN

Tens of thousands have protested government plans to lift an Islamic headscarf ban at universities, with critics warning the move threatens Turkey's fiercely guarded secular system, the ABC reported (3/2/08).

Protesters in Ankara called on the government to resign. Turkey's Islamist-rooted ruling party had submitted to Parliament a draft amendment to allow the Islamic headscarf in universities. SEE <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/02/03/2152990.htm>

UK TO SEND BACK LONE CHILDREN

Unaccompanied child asylum seekers, denied the right to stay in the UK, are to be deported before they reach 18, the British Government announced, the BBC reported (31/1/08)..

Currently, the Border and Immigration Agency waits until a young person turns 18 before beginning proceedings. Children's rights campaigners say the move could put those being sent back at risk but the government said authorities would not deport children until they were "100% sure" of a safe reception. About 2,000 unaccompanied children seek asylum in the UK every year.

BRITISH TROOPS ACCUSED OF TORTURE

A lawyer representing nine Iraqi civilians has accused British troops of "off the scale" torture and abuse in Iraq, The Australian reported (2/2/08). Britain's Ministry of Defence said it was re-investigating the case.

The allegations concern events that took place in the southern Iraqi town of Majar-al-Kabir on May 14 2004, when British forces fought an intense gun battle with insurgents.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23147730-12377,00.html>

E. HEALTH & MEANS

MSF WITHDRAWS AFTER THREE DIE IN SOMALIA

A Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) media release stated it was outraged by what appeared to be an organised killing of three colleagues, Victor, Damien and Mohamed Bidhaan, as well as two other people, on January 28 in Kismayo, Somalia.

The MSF staff of 87 has been withdrawn from 14 projects across Somalia. Dr Fournier said, "Although life-saving medical activities continue under the supervision of our dedicated Somali colleagues, the suspension will clearly hamper the essential medical work of MSF in Somalia." DETAILS: Sally McMillan on 0447 482 379.

WHO: TOBACCO INDUSTRY 'TARGETS DEVELOPING WORLD'

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the world and one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced, WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan and New York Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg were scheduled to tell a New York news conference (7/2/08). Key findings and recommendations of the WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic show tobacco kills 5.4 million people a year.

The report also documents a shift to the developing world, where 80 per cent of the more than eight million annual tobacco-related deaths projected by 2030 are expected to occur.

The MPOWER package provides countries with a roadmap to meet commitments to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. WHO is working with global partners to scale-up help to implement the strategies.

DETAILS: Alison Clements-Hunt, WHO. Mobile: +41 79 516 5601; on +41 22 791 5539.

INDONESIA AFFECTED BY AVIAN FLU

Indonesia is home to almost half of the world's human deaths from bird flu. In addition, many Indonesian households rely on raising chickens for income, so financial losses from destroyed flocks are adding up (1/2/08). REPORT:

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/01/world/asia/01flu.html?_r=2&ref=health&oref=slogin&oref=slogin

AUSTRALIA AND CHINA JOIN FORCES IN BIRD FLU BATTLE

A team of researchers from the Australian National University will lead a new joint research centre with China conducting research into treatments for Avian Influenza (Bird Flu), an ANU media release stated (4/1/08).

The new Australia-China Centre for Phenomics Research, funded by the Chinese and Australian governments by matching funds of \$1,536,200, will be located in the ANU's John Curtin School for Medical Research. The funding will be used to study alterations in the genome code that lead to increased resistance to Avian Influenza.

DETAILS: Martyn Pearce, ANU Media Office on 02 6125 5575 / 0416 249 245.

Website:<http://www.anu.edu.au/media>

DISPLACED PEOPLE CAUSE HOSPITAL ANXIETY

Last October 27-year-old Guillermina Freitas Corte Real entered Dili's Timor Leste national hospital for gall stone surgery. Her initial anxiety was the medical procedure, but she soon became terrified of developing a severe post-operative infection, "It was a completely unsanitary environment," she told IRIN (31/2/08), "because all these goats, pigs and chickens were wandering freely around the hospital." The livestock belonged to some 1,500 to 2,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), the Irin News reported. ARTICLE:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76508>

LONGER HIV DRUG TREATMENTS HELP INFANTS

Treating HIV/AIDS-positive mothers and pregnant women with longer courses of antiretroviral drugs helps reduce the risk of transferring the disease to their children during breast feeding, according to several studies unveiled on Monday. Almost half of HIV/AIDS infections among children in developing countries are a result of breast feeding, the New York Times reported (5/2/08):

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/05/health/05hiv.html?ref=health>

STD RATE IN COMMUNITIES 'PREVALENT'

Sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhoea and chlamydia are so prevalent in some Aboriginal communities that mass treatment without individual testing may be the best chance to address the problem, according to findings published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* (4/2/08) Recent surveys show infection rates to be as high as 25 per cent of the population in some communities, the New York Times reported (5/2/08). REPORT:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/05/world/asia/05australia.html?ref=world>

DONORS NEED TO ADJUST FOOD AID STRATEGY

Donor countries like the US need to rethink how they carry out their food aid to impoverished countries so that it focuses less on the quantity of food and looks more toward the quality of the products, it is argued. A fine-tuned strategy is necessary if the battle against malnutrition is to be won, Doctors Without Borders adviser Susan Shepherd writes in the New York Times (30/1/08).

ARTICLE: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/30/opinion/30shepherd.html>

DISPLACED KENYANS LACK HEALTH CARE

The WHO has expressed concern for the health of those who fled conflict in Kenya's Rift Valley, now sheltering around Nairobi, Eldoret, Nakuru and Naivasha (1/2/08).

UN agencies have prepared relief plans for 500 000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and estimate up to 250 000 people so far were gathering in make-shift camps or living with host communities. Estimates indicate that over 75 per cent are women and children. Some are under 18, many orphaned or unaccompanied. Sites are crowded, with poor shelter, water supply, sanitation (in some camps, toilet person ratio is 1 for 500), food shortages, no cooking fuel, precarious access to health care and medicine shortages.

CONTACTS: Fadéla Chaib, WHO Communications officer, on: + 41 22 791 32 28; 041 79 475 55 56; email: chaibf@who.int; WHO information: <http://www.who.int/hac/en>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/05/world/asia/05australia.html?ref=world>

ILLEGAL ORGAN TRADE DUPES WORLD'S POOR

Impoverished people from countries including Brazil, Romania and India are lured into selling organs by black marketeers looking to supply body parts to patients in wealthier countries, Organ

Watch warns. American and Japanese consumers are the world's largest purchasers of illegal organs, the Toronto Star reported. Report: <http://www.thestar.com/News/GTA/article/300154>

UN WARNS ANOTHER MASSIVE OPIUM POPPY CROP COMING

Another massive opium harvest is expected in Afghanistan and Western countries should brace for a commensurate influx of heroin, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime warned on Wednesday

Afghanistan called on Tuesday for more help to stamp out opium production as donor nations gathered in Tokyo to try to coordinate policy on the struggling nation, Reuters reported (5/2/08).

Afghanistan produces more than 90 per cent of the world's opium, used to make heroin, and the industry provides income for hundreds of thousands of Afghans, the World Bank and the British Government said in a joint report. Revenue from the opium industry is believed to be used to fund the Taliban.

F. OTHER NEWS

2020 SUMMIT SEEKS AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE

The Rudd Government will convene an Australia 2020 Summit at Parliament House on April 19/20 to help shape a long-term strategy for the nation's future. The idea is to bring together 1,000 of the best and brightest brains to tackle the long term challenges confronting Australia's future – challenges which require long-term responses from the nation beyond the usual three-year electoral cycle, a Federal Government media release stated (3/2/08).

The summit's objectives are to harness the best ideas across the nation and apply those ideas to the 10 core challenges identified by the government to secure Australia's long-term future to 2020. The summit will debate ten critical areas:

- Future directions for the Australian economy – including education, skills, training, science and innovation as part of the nation's productivity agenda;
- Economic infrastructure, the digital economy and the future of our cities;
- Population, sustainability, climate change, and water
- Future directions for rural industries and rural communities;
- A long-term national health strategy – including the challenges of preventative health, workforce planning and the ageing population;
- Strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion;
- Options for the future of Indigenous Australia;
- Towards a creative Australia: the future of the arts, film and design;

The future of Australian governance: renewed democracy, a more open government (including the role of the media), the structure of the federation and the rights and responsibilities of citizens; and Australia's future security and prosperity in a rapidly changing region and world.

DETAILS: http://www.pm.gov.au/news/releases/2008/media_release_00020.cfm

MINISTERS VISIT PACIFIC ISLANDS

A joint visit to Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati (February 1/ 7) was undertaken by Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs, Duncan Kerr, and Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan, (1/2/08). They said the government was seeking to strengthen Australia's engagement with the region and to further develop constructive relations with Pacific neighbours. In addition to calls on governments and key interlocutors, they also visited projects funded by AusAID and the Australian Council for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). DETAILS: Mr Kerr's office on 02 6234 5255; department on 02 6261 1555.

AUSTRALIA TO NEGOTIATE ON ANTI-COUNTERFEITING

Australia will begin negotiations with a number of trading partners on a new Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA). The agreement aims to establish a new standard of intellectual property rights (IPR) enforcement to combat the high levels of trade in counterfeit and pirated goods worldwide, a Federal Government media release stated (1/2/08). A recent OECD report observed that international trade in counterfeit and pirated goods was growing rapidly, with an estimated value of US\$200 billion annually. The negative impacts of this trade were wide-ranging, creating significant costs for governments, consumers and businesses. CONTACTS: Mr Crean's office 02 6277 7420; department on 02 6261 1555.

INDONESIA AND AUSTRALIA SIGN TO CO-OPERATE ON TRANSPORT SAFETY

The governments of Australia and the Republic of Indonesia have signed an agreement to work together to improve Indonesia's transport safety. "Australia's assistance will complement the substantial efforts that the government of the Republic of Indonesia has already taken to improve the safety of their transport services," said Minister of Transport Anthony Albanese.

DETAILS: http://www.minister.infrastructure.gov.au/aa/releases/2008/january/aa009_2008.htm

FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTERS VISIT

Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Yang visited Australia over February 4/5 for discussions with Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith on bilateral priorities and review the program of bilateral dialogues, including on political, security, economic, trade, human rights and consular issues.

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

The Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Hassan Wirajuda, also visited over February 7/9. Themes of discussions included international issues, counter-terrorism, illegal fishing, people smuggling, avian influenza, climate change and interfaith dialogue.

DETAILS: http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2008/fa-s026_08.html

UKRAINE TO JOIN WTO

Trade Minister Simon Crean has welcomed the completion of negotiations for Ukraine to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Its parliament has now to finalise its domestic ratification.

Ukraine's WTO accession will facilitate the further strengthening of a bilateral trade relationship.

DETAILS: http://www.trademinister.gov.au/releases/2008/sc_014.html

JOURNAL TRACKS MIGRATION'S ACHIEVEMENTS, WOES

Tens of thousands each month read the online journal *Migration Information Source*, the brainchild of editor Kirin Kalia who tracks migration and its effects on populations across the globe, according to [The New York Times](#) (4/2/08).

HIGHER LEVELS OF IMMIGRATION ARE INEVITABLE: REPORT

Increased levels of immigration to Australia are an inevitable consequence of future labour requirements, according to the authors of a new report (5/2/08). The report, *Population and Australia's Future Labour Force*, was published by the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences. The authors, Professor Peter McDonald, ANU, and Professor Glenn Withers, head of the Economic Planning Advisory Commission with the previous Labor government, recommend the Federal Government should establish an independent inquiry to determine the best planning and policy approaches for immigration to meet future labour needs. REPORT: www.assa.edu.au

DETAILS: Martyn Pearce on 02 6125 5575 / 0416 249 245; www.anu.edu.au/media.

POLICE AND YOUNG SUDANESE IN FOOTBALL CHALLENGE

Officers from the Queensland Police Service (QPS) and young members of the Sudanese community will test their skills in a QPS versus Sudanese Youth Football (Soccer) Challenge on Sunday February 10 at 11am at Annerley Soccer Club, Greenslopes, Brisbane.

Sergeant Jim Bellos, cross cultural liaison officer for the Metropolitan South Region, said the match had been suggested by Sudanese youth who play locally. The aim was to celebrate diversity and encourage a fun and safe community.

He said, "It is very important to have police participation because many people from new and emerging communities in Brisbane see police in a negative way because of negative experiences they have had in their homeland, and this sort of community initiative helps to change these previous perceptions." (From Brisbane Actionweb for Refugee Collaboration).

G. MEDIA MATTERS

MEDIA BLACKOUTS RULED OUT

Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty had been slapped down by the Rudd Government over his call for a ban on media reporting of counter-terrorism cases, The Age reported (1/2/08). Federal Attorney-General Robert McClelland has ruled out the use of media blackouts, it was also reported.

ARTICLE: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/keelty-rebuffed-by-minister-over-media-comments/2008/01/31/1201714153269.html>

SPEECH [Mick Keelty's address to The Sydney Institute](#)

CHINA FREES JOURNALIST

Chinese authorities released Hong Kong journalist Ching Cheong on Tuesday, two years into a five-year sentence he received on charges of spying for Taiwan. China, which faced pressure from human rights advocates over Ching's detention, gave no reason for his release, the New York Times reported. (2/6/2/08). Mr Ching was freed just a day before a court in the eastern city of Hangzhou sentenced freelance writer and democracy activist Lu Gengsong to four years' in prison for "inciting subversion of state power". DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +61 2 9333 0919. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/06/world/asia/06china.html?_r=1&ref=world&oref=slogin

AFGHANS STUDENT WILL NOT BE EXECUTED

After discussions between the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, and media representatives Afghan AIJA president Rahimullah Samander said the meeting was a positive step toward reversing the death sentence imposed on January 22. The condemned student journalist Sayed Pervez Kambaksh would not face execution, a senior government official in Afghanistan had indicated earlier, the UK Independent reported (6/2/08). The Independent launched a petition in support of Mr Kambaksh. The UN senior human rights advocate, Louise Arbour, has written to the president and his top officials, "reminding them of their responsibilities" under the country's constitution, which enshrines freedom of speech.

Representatives of journalists' unions and associations across the Asia-Pacific region, meeting in Kuala Lumpur, also called on the president and government of Afghanistan to take immediate action to overturn the death penalty imposed on Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh (2/2/08).

DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

ARTICLE: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/afghan-government-official-says-that-student-will-not-be-executed-778686>.

REGIONAL MEDIA UNITE TO FIGHT FOR PRESS FREEDOM

Leaders and representatives of journalists' associations and trade unions across the Asia-Pacific region are to work together more closely within a new International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Asia-Pacific, launched in Kuala Lumpur, the IFJ reported (6/2/08).

The IFJ Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting, held over February 2/3, pledged to work together in a formal group to fight for the rights of journalists and to improve press freedom across the Asia-Pacific region. The IFJ Asia-Pacific is the representative voice of journalists in the region.

The IFJ Asia-Pacific affirmed key goals as advancing journalists' industrial and professional rights, promoting press freedom and an independent media, enhancing gender equity, protecting journalists' safety and building strong and independent journalists' unions.

Delegates agreed to explore all opportunities to build sub-regional alliances of affiliates and other relevant organisations, such as the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN). The inaugural Steering Committee members include Norila Daud (National Union of Journalists, Malaysia), Sunanda Deshapriya (Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association), Christopher Warren (Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, Australia) Jun Yamakoshi (Nipporo, Japan) and Michael Yu (Association of Taiwan Journalists), with Jacqueline Park as secretary.

The new regional group issued protest statements to authorities in Afghanistan (on behalf of Mr Kambakhsh) and Sri Lanka (concerning official aggression towards media), both signed by the leaders of 19 Asia Pacific media organisations. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +61 2 9333 0919.

SRI LANKA: The IFJ Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting, in Kuala Lumpur, on Tuesday issued a joint statement to President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Sri Lankan Government of Sri Lanka (5/2/08).

It included, "We condemn in the strongest terms the disrespect and outright physical aggression shown by members of the Government and senior public officials toward journalists, media institutions and the right to freedom of speech ... journalists and media institutions in Sri Lanka are under extreme pressure to comply with the Government's propaganda on conflict and peace if they want to avoid targeted hate speech and rabid public condemnation. Official censorship and self-censorship are fuelling a dangerous cycle of misinformation and conflict, and journalists are finding it increasingly difficult to act in the public interest."

The meeting demanded that the president and the government desist immediately from implicitly or explicitly inciting violence against journalists and media institutions, by way of death threats, intimidation, physical harm and the use of language that incites hate and drives conflict. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

NEPAL: Deep concern about the safety of journalists and media workers in Nepal was expressed by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) after a bomb was thrown at a radio station, Indreni FM 97.6, in Birgunj in central Nepal on January 30 (1/2/08).

The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) reported that an unidentified group hurled a bomb at the premises of the radio station about 8pm. No one was injured. The Broadcasting Association of Nepal (BAN) said the attack was intended as a threat to the station for its vocal support of democracy and social welfare issues. The incident is the latest in a series of attacks on media during January, with at least 15 journalists or media workers attacked since the beginning of 2008.

It was reported that journalists faced dangers from individuals as well as being targeted by organised groups, as had allegedly occurred in the murder of Pushkar Shrestha, the editor of *New Highway* and *New Season*, who died on January 10. Responsibility for Shrestha's death was claimed by representatives of the Jwala Singh faction of the Janatrantrik Terai Mutki Morcha (JTMM-J), an armed group fighting for independence for the Terai region in southern Nepal. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

LOOK OUT, REPTILES, HERE COME KEELTY'S SIZE 12s

"You've got to admire Mick Keelty, our top-dog copper," writes Richard Ackland, in the Sydney Morning Herald (1/2/08). "Boldly and single-handedly, he has set about reforming the fragile flower of open justice. It has been in a parlous condition for some time, what with so much prejudice about, so maybe Mick's right - close it down completely. Herd all those bad-breathed reptiles and their notebooks out of the courts, bolt the doors and let the judges and lawyers get on with the public-spirited task of slotting people. The impression I got from the federal police

commissioner's speech to a public rally in Sydney on Tuesday was that he was rather keen on the concept of the "media blackout". justinian@lawpress.com.au
ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/01/31/1201714145872.html>

KURDS' POWER WANES AS ARAB ANGER RISES

As a minority group in [Iraq](#), the Kurds have enjoyed disproportionate influence in the country's politics since the ouster of [Saddam Hussein](#) in 2003, the New York Times reports (1/2/08). But now their leverage appears to be declining as tensions rise with Iraqi Arabs, raising the spectre of another fissure alongside the sectarian divide between Sunnis and Shiites.
ARTICLE: [Kurds' Power Wanes as Arab Anger Rises - New York Times](#)

MY FAMILY, MY KILLERS

Violence at the hands of their relatives is more of a threat to some Muslim women than racism, writes James Button in the Sydney Morning Herald (2/2/08). The grainy video, taken on a mobile phone and played in a British court last year, shows a young woman lying on a bed, telling how her father had tried to kill her that day ... Within a month, the 19-year-old was dead. ARTICLE: http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/01/1201801034293.html?s_rid=brisbanetimes:top5

CONVERTS' DANGEROUS PULL TOWARDS EXTREMISM

Lawyer Irfan Yusuf writes in the Sydney Morning Herald, "This week the ABC screened *Jihad Sheilas*, the story of two Australian women who became caught up in a whirlpool of religious extremism. They were just two among a tiny proportion of a generation of Muslim youths and converts radicalised by people linked to past conflicts in Afghanistan." (7/2/08).
ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/06/1202233942883.html>

US FORCED TO ACCEPT STALLED DEMOCRATISATION IN ASIA

The US has readjusted its democratisation hopes for the Caucasus, Central and South Asian countries, quietly accepting the growing undemocratic methods of autocratic leaders from Georgia to Pakistan, the New York Times reports. [The New York Times](#) (3/2/08).

THE WAR THAT CAN BRING NEITHER PEACE NOR FREEDOM

The Afghan war, you will remember, was supposed to be the "good war", Seumas Milne writes in the UK Guardian (5/2/08). Unlike the catastrophe of Iraq, from which most former cheerleaders still prefer to avert their eyes, Afghanistan was thought to be different. Gordon Brown felt able to tell parliament only six weeks ago that "we are winning the battle in Afghanistan". Paddy Ashdown, rejected at the last minute as UN proconsul in Kabul, was clearly closer to the mark than Brown when he declared: "We are losing in Afghanistan."
ARTICLE <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story/0,,2252640,00.html> or [The Guardian](#)

WE TORTURED AND WE'D DO IT AGAIN

After years of [dodging and dissembling](#), the Bush administration has boldly embraced an interrogation tactic that's been an iconic and almost universally condemned form of torture since the Spanish Inquisition, the Washington Post reported (6/2/08). President Bush would authorise water-boarding future terrorism suspects if certain criteria are met, a White House spokesman said, the day after the director of the CIA for the first time publicly acknowledged his agency used the tactic, which generally involves strapping a prisoner to a board, covering his face or mouth with a cloth, and pouring water over his face to create the sensation of drowning. ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/blog/2008/02/06/BL2008020602244.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

L'ÉTRANGER

In an article for The Nation (March 5/3/07 issue), [Patricia J. Williams](#) includes a quote from Senator Joseph Biden: *I mean, you got the first sort of mainstream African-American who's articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy. I mean, that's a storybook, man.* - Senator Joseph Biden, in *faint but unfettered praise of Senator Barack Obama*.

“Frankly, what I found most unforgivable about Senator Biden's recent remarks was his utter failure to learn from a past in which he was intimately implicated. He was, after all, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee when our spectacularly inarticulate President's father nominated Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court ... A few years later, it was Colin Powell who was perceived as shockingly articulate; then Condoleezza Rice.” Patricia Williams, who contributed to the ABC's *Late Night Live* on Monday, is a Columbia University law professor.
ARTICLE: <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070305/williams>

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>.

For more information about the United Nations Association of Australia in your state or if you want to join UNAA, access <http://www.unaa.org.au/> or contact:

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