

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.

February 29 2008

539

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Earlier editions of UNity 2004-05, 2006 and 2007 are on the UNAA website: www.unaa.org.au or email the editor.

(It may be necessary to copy and paste links into your browser/address box)

A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES

UN FLAG FLIES INTO TROUBLE AND SPACE
SECURITY COUNCIL SCOLDS ERITREA

B. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENT

US STANCE GETS MIXED REACTION
CHINESE MARKET REQUIRES GREEN CREDENTIALS

C. PEACE & SECURITY

LOBBYING CONTINUES ON NUCLEAR AND CLUSTER WEAPONS
PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SET

D. HUMAN RIGHTS & MEANS

UN CAMPAIGN TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
WELFARE PAYMENTS QUARANTINE STARTS

E. HEALTH & MEANS

CALL TO LIMIT WORLD POPULATION
UN AGENCIES BACK END TO FEMALE MUTILATION

F. OTHER NEWS

RUSSIAN FREEDOM OF SPEECH 'SHRINKS'

G. MEDIA MATTERS

H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES

UN FLAG FLIES INTO TROUBLE AS WELL AS SPACE

Although the United Nations flag used to provide protection, it was now becoming a target, the head of an independent panel tasked by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to assess the safety and security of the world body's staff worldwide cautioned (28/2/08).

Announcing the composition of the six-member panel at UN Headquarters in New York, veteran diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi said the new body would take a "critical look at the existing situation" to determine how the UN and its member states could bolster the safety and security for the organisation's people and premises globally.

A UN flag is to be flown to the International Space Station in April before returning to Earth to be displayed at a space exhibition in Vienna, the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs said on Thursday. The office said the blue and white emblem would be ferried to the orbiting space station by South Korean astronaut Ko San who is to conduct scientific experiments there for eight days in April. On its return to Earth, the flag is to be presented to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon before being put on display at a space exhibition at the International Centre, Vienna. DETAILS:

<http://www.int.oil.co.za/index.php>

SECURITY COUNCIL URGES EAST TIMOR REBELS TO QUIT

Rebels in East Timor should lay down their weapons and end their fight, which earlier this month was seen as behind the attempted assassination of the country's president, the UN Security Council urged on Monday. The council extended the UN peace mission in East Timor for one year (26/2/08), BLOOMBERG REPORT:

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601081&sid=ayNyJDlKBj3s&refer=australia>

NEW SANCTIONS FOR IRAN?

The UN Security Council is considering whether to impose new sanctions on Iran over its controversial nuclear program. Iran has warned that if the council proceeds with more penalties the Islamic regime would respond with unspecified "deserving action." The warning followed an International Atomic Energy Agency report that said it had been unable to determine the "full nature" of Tehran's nuclear ambitions. REPORT:

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5ivjorPSVHpxyB9DJXB-LhJp-fS9g>

ERITREA SCOLDED BY SECURITY COUNCIL FOR IMPEDING PEACEKEEPERS

The UN Security Council strongly criticised Eritrea for its repeated harassment of the UN peacekeeping mission on the tense border with Ethiopia. After having forced the UN troops to decide to withdraw from Eritrea by cutting off fuel supplies, the country was obstructing the withdrawal by not providing necessary assistance, the council said. It awaited a report from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon "to deal with this issue in a more comprehensive manner." (21/2/08). REPORT:

http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jxjxbkrKdpJWbFoZ5RH_SCY6WGQUN_URGED_TO

SANCTION TAMIL TIGERS FOR CHILD SOLDIERS

An international human rights group has called on the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels for using child soldiers, the BBC reported (21/2/08).

A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report has also accused the government of ignoring child recruitment by an allied paramilitary force. HRW made its allegations as UN experts met to discuss the use of underage soldiers in the Sri Lankan war. A UN envoy is visiting the island nation to assess the conflict.

"The Security Council should punish their brazen violations with concrete action," HRW child rights advocate Jo Becker said. REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7257288.stm

IMF 'MUST REFORM TO REMAIN RELEVANT'

The US stepped up its call for reform of the International Monetary Fund, calling for a shake-up of its executive board as well as its shareholding structure to give greater weight to emerging economies, FT.com reported (25/2/08).

David McCormick, the undersecretary for international affairs at the US Treasury, proposed cutting the number of executive directors from 24 to 20 and eliminating the rule that reserves positions for the US, Japan, Germany, France and Britain. The proposal is likely to result in fewer European directors on the IMF board.

Mr McCormick said if a reform package were agreed in time, the Bush administration would go to Congress this year to seek approval for the sale of some of the IMF's gold to establish an endowment to finance its operations. REPORT:

FT.COM: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8ba0ddb-e3ed-11dc-8799-0000770fd2ac.html>

B. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENT

US CLIMATE STANCE GETS MIXED WELCOME AT UN: Yvo de Boer, UN climate secretariat head, welcomed US comments that it may be willing to agree to binding targets to reduce emissions. However, he said the American stance that China and other emerging countries must follow suit "is not realistic" (25/2/08). ARTICLE:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/sns-ap-climate-us-un,1,3314018.story>

BEIJING MARKET TO REQUIRE GREEN CREDENTIALS

Companies listed on the Beijing stock market will be required to publicly disclose their environmental credentials, China's State Environmental Protection Administration said on Monday. The move is part of a larger push by Chinese authorities to address China's mounting environmental pollution problems. (25/2/08).REPORT: <http://www.enn.com/pollution/article/31711>

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES

A strategic review of the Federal Government's climate change policies was announced on Thursday by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Lindsay Tanner, and the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Penny Wong,

Roger Wilkins, the head of Citigroup's public sector group and former head of the NSW Cabinet Office, will lead the review, to be based in the Department of Finance and Deregulation.

The review will develop a set of principles to assist its assessment of whether existing programs are complementary to an emissions trading scheme. These principles are expected to include whether programs address clear market failures that are likely to continue after the introduction of emissions trading or which may be necessary to prepare for emissions trading.

"The introduction of emissions trading represents a fundamental shift in the way greenhouse gas emissions are managed," Ms Wong said.

The aim of the review would ensure that existing climate change programs were efficient, effective and complementary to the emissions trading scheme, Mr Tanner said. "The review is not intended as a cost cutting exercise."

The review, due to report in July, will also inform Federal Government input into COAG. DETAILS: George Wright on 0419 556 616 (Tanner) and John Olenich on 0408 841 850 (Wong).

TRACKING TO KYOTO SHOWS 'HUGE POTENTIAL FOR EMISSIONS CUTS'

The release of the latest *Tracking to Kyoto* paper was welcomed by Australian Greens climate change spokesperson, Senator Christine Milne, who called on the Rudd Government to

recognise the potential for deep and fast emissions cuts implied by the paper (25/2/08).

Senator Milne said the report showed that major keystone policies like an increased renewable energy target could achieve very significant cuts in emissions.

"The best outcome of this paper's release would be if Prime Minister Rudd and his ministers now recognise that, by adopting several more such sensible, large-scale policies, they would see several more such chunks taken out of our emissions profile, putting us on track towards the kind of reductions we need to prevent catastrophic climate change.

"For example, EASI, the household energy efficiency retrofit program the Greens took to the last election, would generate 30 million tonnes of savings every year were the government to adopt it. Similarly bold programs to shift priorities from roads to rails, and to stop old growth logging, would see Australia's emissions trajectory turn around and start heading downwards," she said.

"We have no time to lose. May's Budget must start shifting fossil fuel subsidies to renewables, efficiency and clean fuels, and we must see plans to make 2008 the year Australia's emissions peak, not simply slowing continued growth right through to 2020."

DETAILS: Tim Hollo on 0437 587 562.

MINCHIN DOUBTFUL ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

Opposition defence spokesman, and leader of the opposition in the Senate Nick Minchin said there were still doubts on the science used to back up claims about climate change (27/2/08).

"I do think that the claims being made in relation to climate change generally are often very exaggerated," he told ABC Television. "And even Ross Garnaut in his report makes it clear that there are many, many scientists who doubt the voracity of the IPCC's (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) findings, and he called for greater debate about the scientific evidence." Senator Minchin said Australia should only act on carbon emissions in consort with its major trading partners. REPORT: <http://au.news.yahoo.com/080226/2/15ys6.html>

UNEP LAUNCHES 'CLIMATE NEUTRAL' NETWORK

The UN Environment Program has rolled out an Internet-based forum that will let countries and cities swap ideas on how to drastically reduce or offset greenhouse gas emissions. (21/2/08).

REPORT: <http://africa.reuters.com/wire/news/usnL21632892.html>

EUROPEAN INDUSTRY SEEKS QUICK ACTION ON TARGETS

As firms in energy-intensive industries await the European Union's decisions on how to battle climate change, investment plans are on hold and supply is coming from less environmentally friendly production regions, companies warn. Business leaders are urging the EU to define targets, limits and penalties as soon as possible (21/1/08).

REPORT: <http://www.enn.com/climate/article/31567>

DEMOCRATS: 2050 TARGET OF 60 PER CENT CUTS FAR TOO LOW

"The truth is, the 2050 target of 60 per cent cuts is far too low to avoid serious global warming damage and, as the interim Garnaut Report shows, setting early mid-term targets is crucial," said Senator Lyn Allison, Australian Democrats leader (22/2/08).

"Three more years' wait means over \$1 billion lost in investment for Australian based manufacturers and service companies and an extra 30 million tonnes of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere," she said. DETAILS: David Collyer on 0417 613 610.

GREENS: FORGET TAX CUTS AND RE-FIT HOMES

Australian Greens climate change spokesperson, Senator Christine Milne, called on Prime Minister Rudd to follow expert advice and abandon tax cuts in favour of an ambitious project to retrofit Australia's 7.4 million homes with energy efficiency measures (20/2/08).

"It would massively reduce greenhouse emissions, deliver Australian families savings on their energy bills, boost jobs and the manufacturing sector, and would be a non-inflationary investment in Australia's infrastructure," she said.

The Energy Efficiency Access and Savings Initiative (EASI) could reduce greenhouse emissions by close to 30 million tonnes each year. The total cumulative cost of the program was projected at \$22 billion over 10 years, which will be recouped by the Federal Government in a HECS-style repayments scheme through energy bills. DETAILS: Tim Hollo on 0437 587 562

AUSTRALIAN SOLAR TECHNOLOGY SHINES

Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, welcomed the launch of a major joint venture to build perhaps the biggest and most efficient solar power plant in the world.

Australian company Solar Systems and TRUenergy will construct the \$420 million photovoltaic solar plant in northern Victoria. TRUenergy is a subsidiary of the China Light and Power Group, one of the largest power utilities in Asia.

Senator Wong said the project would use world-leading technology developed by Solar Systems, drawing on high performance solar cells, originally developed to power satellites. When completed it is expected to produce enough clean energy to power up to 45,000 homes. The Federal Government will contribute up to \$79.5 million towards the project, with the Victorian Government providing \$50m.

HUMANS HURT CORAL REEFS: REPORT

Coral reefs in areas devoid of large human populations fare better than reefs overwhelmed by human activities like fishing and sewage disposal, says a new report set to be published Wednesday by the Public Library of Science Biology (26/2/08). ARTICLE: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/26/science/earth/26reef.html?ref=science>

'DOOMSDAY' SEED VAULT SET TO OPEN

The major underground vault that has been under construction the last couple of years in the Arctic and that will preserve crops from all over the world in case of future natural or man-made disasters will officially open Tuesday. Dignitaries such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai will be present as the Svalbard Global Seed Vault opens its doors to millions of seeds from almost every country, the BBC reported (25/2/08).

REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7262525.stm>

ADVICE OVER JAPANESE WHALING

The Federal Government called on all parties in the Southern Ocean - including all protest and whaling vessels - to exercise the utmost restraint, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said (22/2/08). While the Australia strongly opposed Japan's scientific whaling program and wanted Japan to cease whaling in the Southern Ocean, the Federal Government did not condone any violent or unsafe actions which put lives at risk on the high seas, he said.

DROPLET AND THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN

What would one need to put in place to fix the Murray Darling Basin's problems no matter what climatic future arrives? What would a future-proofed MDB entitlement system look like? These are questions posed by Prof Mike Young, Research Chair, Water Economics and Management, School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Adelaide.

His report proposes a confident step-change to a future-proofed regime. A new entitlement system, as well as a new plan, was needed, he said this week. "We need to a system that has integrity. Until the property-right foundations upon which the Basin is run are fixed, problems will continue to occur."

EARLIER DROPLETS AND REPORTS: www.myyoung.net.au and droplets@adelaide.edu.au;
Mike.Young@adelaide.edu.au
REPORT: A future-proofed Basin.pdf (406KB)

C. PEACE & SECURITY

CLUSTER BOMB TREATY PROVES ELUSIVE BUT TALKS CONTINUE

Efforts by 120 countries to negotiate a treaty to ban the use of cluster bombs have failed to reach agreement in New Zealand, though those attending reported progress and a broad agreement to meet again. Major cluster bomb producers including Russia, the US, China and Israel, are not participating in the negotiations, The Globe and Mail/AP reported (22/2/08).

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20080222.wclusterbombs0222/BNSStory/International/home>

ACHIEVING VISION OF WORLD FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The future of global nuclear disarmament will require much more than unilateral actions or non-binding agreements, commented Sergio Duarte, UN Representative for Disarmament Affairs, at a seminar on nuclear disarmament in Oslo, Norway (26/2/08).

Given the sensitivity of their perceived national security interests, states that possess nuclear weapons would not likely give them up in exchange for informal understandings, political assurances, vague promises, or toasts, he said. They would instead want the commitments registered in the most binding form possible.

SPEECH: http://disarmament.un.org/docs/HR_OSLO26022008.pdf

CONFERENCE WEBSITE: <http://disarmament.nrpa.no/>

DETAILS: Alyn Ware, International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms, PO Box 24-429, Manners Street, Wellington, Aotearoa-New Zealand, on +64 4 496-9629/+1 646 7528702 (travelling); alyn@lcnp.org and www.ialana.net

PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM INAUGURATED

The inaugural Pacific Islands Forum Ministerial Standing Committee meeting on the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was held this week in Honiara.

Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said the meeting was productive and positive and provided an opportunity to underscore Australia's ongoing commitment to RAMSI and close cooperation with the region and Solomon Islands Government.

Saying RAMSI had been a great success in restoring law and order in Solomon Islands, he said the committee underlined the importance of consultation between the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI to develop jointly agreed development strategies, and endorsed the proposal to jointly develop a Solomon Islands Government-RAMSI Partnership Framework.

He had also met Premier Young Vivian of Niue, who will preside over the Pacific Islands Forum and host the annual leaders' meeting in August. The Forum Ministerial Standing Committee is made up of the foreign ministers of Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Niue, Solomon Islands and Australia. DETAILS: Minister's office on 02 6277 7500; department on 02 6261 1555.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

GAMBARI DOES SOUTH-EAST ASIAN ROUNDS OVER MYANMAR

The Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Myanmar was in Singapore this week to meet senior officials and express his appreciation for the country's continued support for UN efforts to bring about democratic change in its troubled South-East Asian neighbour, the UN News Centre reported (25/2/08).

Ibrahim Gambari met with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Foreign Minister George Yeo of Singapore to exchanged views on recent developments in Myanmar and the way forward. He also visited Beijing and Jakarta and then headed for Tokyo. He hopes to return to Myanmar in early March, his third visit since the authorities used force against peaceful demonstrators.

ASIA

PAKISTAN'S ELECTION WINNERS PROMISE NEW APPROACH

The winners of Pakistan's parliamentary elections said on Tuesday that they would take a new approach to fighting Islamic militants by pursuing more dialogue than military confrontation, and that they would undo the crackdown on the media and restore independence to the judiciary, the New York Times reported (20/2/08). Asif Ali Zardari, who leads the party of assassinated opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, said in Islamabad that many unpopular policies would be scrapped. ARTICLE:

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/02/world/asia/20pstan.html?_r=1&th&emc=th&oref=slogin

BILLS BUT NO RECEIPTS

Once a month, Pakistan's Defence Ministry delivers 15 to 20 pages of spreadsheets to the US Embassy in Islamabad, listing costs for feeding, clothing, billeting and maintaining 80,000 to 100,000 Pakistani troops in the volatile tribal area along the Afghan border, in support of US counterterrorism efforts. No receipts are attached, the Washington Post/Sydney Morning Herald reported (22/2/08).

In response, the US Defence Department has disbursed about \$US80 million (\$87 million) monthly, or roughly \$US1 billion a year for the past six years. But vague accounting, disputed expenses and suspicions of over-billing have recently made these payments controversial - even within the US Government.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/21/1203467286373.html>

MIDDLE EAST

IRAQI GOVERNMENT DENOUNCES TURKISH INCURSION

The Iraqi Government has denounced a Turkish incursion into northern Iraq in some of the strongest terms heard since the operation began last week, the BBC reported (26/2/08). The Iraqi Cabinet expressed its "rejection and condemnation" of the operation. It called on Ankara to withdraw its troops immediately.

Snow was impeding operations, Turkey's military said, as fighting entered a fifth day and was said to be close to a rebel base in the Zap valley. The Turkish military claim it has killed 153 rebels and lost 19 soldiers since the cross-border attack began on Thursday night. The rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) claim they have killed 81 soldiers.

The Iraqi Cabinet statement condemned Turkish "military interference", calling it a "violation of Iraq's sovereignty". REPORT: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7264401.stm

UN OFFICIAL CONDEMNS SUICIDE ATTACKS

The top UN official in Iraq has strongly condemned the suicide attacks which earlier this week left dozens of people dead and wounded as they headed to the holy city of Karbala, the UN News Centre reported (27/2/08). The Secretary-General's Special Representative, Staffan de Mistura, described the 24 and 25 February attacks as "appalling crimes against humanity in targeting innocent believers practicing their religion. "These acts deserve universal condemnation," he said.

ISRAELI MAYOR WANTS TO TALK TO HAMAS

The mayor of Sderot, an Israeli town repeatedly targeted by rockets fired from the Gaza Strip, says in order to save Israeli lives he is ready to talk to Hamas - despite the international ban on contact with the militant Palestinian organisation, The Guardian reported (23/2/08).

"I would say to Hamas, let's have a ceasefire, let's stop the rockets for the next 10 years and we will see what happens," said Eli Moyal, the mayor, who is a member of the rightwing Likud party. "For me as a person the most important thing is life and I'm ready to do everything for that. I'm ready to talk to the devil."

Senior UN officials agree in private that a political deal with Hamas will be necessary to end the rocket attacks on Sderot. Without a political solution or a ceasefire, "it's quite hard to see how it's going to change in the future except that possibly it will get worse," one official said.

ARTICLE: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/23/israelandthepalestinians>

ISRAELI ARMY ACCUSED OF TURNING A BLIND EYE

An Israeli rights group has claimed there was a "culture of impunity" in the Israeli security forces after the army decided not to order a disciplinary investigation into the killing of 21 Palestinian civilians in the north Gaza town of Beit Hanoun in 2006, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (28/2/08).

This week the Israel Defence Force's adjutant-general said a rare computer malfunction had caused the shells to hit 500m off target, a field that militants had used to fire missiles at Israel. There was therefore no reason to charge any soldier with negligence, Brigadier-General Avihai Mandelblit decided. Earlier that year, seven members of the picnicking Ghalya family were killed by an explosion on a north Gaza beach. In that incident, the military blamed the deaths on a new type of Hamas landmine.

The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem yesterday said the Beit Hanoun decision reflected a "culture of impunity" in the military.

"We have to ask ourselves whether the IDF's internal investigations meet the basic standards of international law, which is that they be independent, open to review and timely," said spokeswoman Sarit Michaeli.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/27/1203788443865.html>

ISRAELIS REJECT ARAB LEAGUE CRITICISM

Israeli officials rejected Arab complaints that they are not committed to a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine and said that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had responded positively to the Arab League initiative as a basis for negotiations.

Mark Regev, a spokesman for Mr Olmert, was responding to recent Arab statements, published in The New York Times, warning Israel that unless it accepted the 2002 proposal — for full recognition of Israel in return for complete withdrawal to the 1967 boundaries — the deal would be withdrawn, the New York Times reported (23/2/08). ARTICLE:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/23/world/middleeast/23mideast.html?ex=1204347600&en=d4dff733eecf947c&ei=5070&emc=eta1>

CYPRUS UNIFICATION HOPES RISE

Turkish and Greek Cypriot leaders are set to work together with renewed energy in an attempt to reunify Cyprus after decades of failed diplomatic efforts to heal the divided island country, Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat said on Monday. The renewed optimism came a day after Greek Cypriots elected a new president, the Toronto Star/AP reported. (26/2/08).

ARTICLE: <http://www.thestar.com/News/World/article/306855>

AFRICA

KENYA RIVALS SIGN POWER-SHARING DEAL

Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga signed an agreement on Friday morning (Australian time) after talks on power-sharing to end a post-election crisis, the ABC reported (29/2/08).

In a televised ceremony, the two political rivals signed a deal hammered out under the mediation of former UN chief Kofi Annan.

A key part of the deal included the creation of the post of prime minister, as demanded by the opposition, Mr Annan said.

The two men have come under intense pressure to compromise over Mr Kibaki's disputed re-election in a December 27 vote, which triggered ethnic violence that killed 1,000 people and displaced 300,000 more.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/02/29/2175843.htm?section=world>

PRE-ELECTION WARNING: POLICE CAN USE GUNS

Zimbabwe's police chief has issued a warning ahead of next month's elections, saying officers were empowered to use firearms "in certain circumstances," state television reported.

Augustine Chihuri, the commissioner general of police, told reporters that political parties contesting in the elections on March 29 had to familiarise themselves "with the relevant pieces of legislation that pertain to gatherings and political meetings," the Sydney Morning Herald reported (27/1/08). Street protests and riots like those witnessed in Kenya recently would not be tolerated, Chihuri said.

President Robert Mugabe's government has been keeping a nervous eye on events in Kenya, where at least 1,500 people have been killed in post-election violence.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/27/1203788428872.html>

CHINA PRESSES DARFUR ON CO-OPERATION

Beijing's top envoy to Sudan pressed the African country's leaders on Sunday to remove all obstacles to the full and effective deployment of the new UN-African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur. China has faced increasing international pressure to use its influence as Sudan's largest trading partner to push Sudanese leaders to support the Darfur peace mission, AlertNet.org/Reuters reported (24/2/08).

REPORT: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L24571773.htm>

UN: DARFURIS FACE DESPERATE SITUATION Recent violence has left tens of thousands of Darfuris with almost nothing and in desperate need of immediate protection, UN officials warned (25/2/08). BBC REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7262570.stm>

AUSTRALIAN PEACEKEEPING MEMORIAL

Australian military, police and civilian peacekeepers have been continually involved in peace operations around the world for over 60 years. The Canberra National Memorials Committee has allocated a site for an Australian Peacekeeping Memorial to be built on ANZAC Parade in Canberra to recognise the sacrifices and contributions of these peacekeepers.

Major General (Rtd) Tim Ford reports that an Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project (APMP) committee has been convened, with elected office bearers and representatives from the Australian Defence Force, the Australian Federal Police and peacekeeping veterans. Major General Ford is chairman. Former WA Governor and peacekeeper, Lieut. General John Sanderson, ABC presenter Geraldine Doogue and Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty have agreed to be patrons.

The Federal Government has made available an initial sum of \$200 000 towards the memorial's construction and approved Deductible Gift Recipient status for donations to be tax deductible. The construction costs have been estimated at \$3.5 million. An opening is scheduled for September 14 2009. Major General Ford said a design competition was underway and four entrants had been short-listed to develop their concepts for further consideration.

DETAILS: Major General Tim Ford, APMP chairman, on 0408 029 295 or

Steve Ayling on 0412 302 116;
www.peacekeepingmemorial.org.au; and <https://peacekeeping.nationalcapital.gov.au/index.asp>

D. HUMAN RIGHTS & MEANS

UN CAMPAIGN TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN LAUNCHED

When Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon kicked off a multi-year global campaign bringing together the United Nations, governments and civil society to try to end violence against women, he called it an issue that “cannot wait.” (25/2/08).

‘Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women’ is scheduled as a priority theme for the 52nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (25/2/08 – 7/3/08).

“At least one out of every three women is likely to be beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime,” Mr Ban said. Through the practice of pre-natal sex selection, countless others were denied the right even to exist, he said at the New York launch during the latest session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Violence against women impeded economic and social growth; therefore the new campaign would run for seven years until 2015, the same target year as the internationally agreed aims known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Noting that weapons of armed conflict today included rape, sexual violence and the abduction of children to become soldiers or sex slaves, Mr Ban spoke of his visits to war-torn areas and conversations with survivors of violence. “This is a campaign for them. It is a campaign for the women and girls who have the right to live free of violence, today and in the future,” he said. “It is a campaign to stop the untold cost that violence against women inflicts on all humankind.”

Mr Ban called on the cooperation of the world’s youth, women’s groups, men around the world, the private sector and Member States to help the new initiative succeed.

ARTICLE: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25741&Cr=women&Cr1=>

Report: UN Economic & Social Council at:

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008worm1664.doc.htm>

UN AGENCIES RALLY TO END FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION: Ten UN agencies have banded together to help eliminate the harmful practice of female genital mutilation within a generation. SEE Health & Means.

AUSTRALIANS URGED TO SUPPORT UN ‘SAY NO TO VIOLENCE’ CAMPAIGN

Supporting the campaign, Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick on Wednesday urged all Australians to sign the ‘Say No to Violence’ petition at:

www.saynotoviolence.org.

Violence against women has been shown as a serious and pervasive human rights violation in Australia. Statistics indicate as many as one in three Australian women are affected by domestic and family violence, domestic violence is the leading contributor to preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women, aged 15 to 44, the estimated total annual cost of domestic violence in 2002-03 was \$8.1 billion, nearly one in five Australian women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 and 80 per cent of women who have experienced sexual assault know the perpetrator.

QUEENSLAND BILL TO QUARANTINE WELFARE PAYMENTS

The culling of welfare payments for poor parenting is spreading from the Northern Territory to other states with the Federal Government warning it's not only Indigenous parents who will be focused on, the Brisbane Courier Mail reported (27/2/08).

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh introduced into State Parliament legislation that will permit control of Aboriginal people's welfare payments by a new Family Responsibilities Commission.

Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin yesterday also announced welfare payment management for selected West Australian communities to combat poor parenting, it was reported.

Parents who failed to send their children to school, those who abused or neglected their children and people who trashed their homes could have their welfare payments managed by the new Queensland Family Responsibility Commission.

Premier Anna Bligh stated in a media release (26/2/08) that the Family Responsibilities Commission Bill would support the restoration of social norms, community authority and individual responsibility in four trial communities.

"This is a radical trial – unique in the world - and I know many people around Australia will be closely watching the trial in Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge when it begins in July this year. While we have a very long way to go I want to congratulate the community leaders in the four communities and the Cape York Institute for their commitment to this trial.

"Some 1800 people who currently receive welfare payments or receive CDEP program funding could be subject to the decisions of the commission during the trial.

"The commission will apply to people who have lived in the trial communities for three months and to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members. Those who could be subject to commission decisions are people who are welfare recipients; or who reside (or resided at relevant times) in trial communities." The trial will run until January 1 2012 and will be independently evaluated. DETAILS: Premier's Office on 07 3224 4500

QUARANTINE OF WELFARE PAYMENTS BEGINS

The Federal Government is commencing the quarantine of welfare payments in town camps in Darwin, Palmerston and Adelaide River and the Belyuen community as part of its commitment to tackling Indigenous disadvantage. Income management is seen as a necessary measure for ensuring welfare payments are spent on children. DETAILS: http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/income_management_25feb08.htm

RESTRICTIONS TO PROTECT ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

Amendments to legislation introduced into Federal Parliament to reduce the exposure of children to pornographic material available on pay television in the Northern Territory was a necessary and welcome move, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma said (21/2/08).

Commissioner Calma said the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Emergency Response Consolidation) Bill 2008 would contribute to addressing child abuse and family disintegration in affected communities.

"The Northern Territory intervention has revealed a determined commitment across society to address the horrors of family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and to create a better future," he said. "Aboriginal children - wherever they live in Australia - deserve a future in which they have the same opportunity as other children to thrive, develop and enjoy life."

REFORM SPEECH SERIES

Delivering a 'Reform' speech at the Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) Queensland's annual meeting, Mr Calma said the new Federal Government had been left with a system limited in its capacity to meet commitments to Indigenous affairs and reconciliation.

"Reform is necessary to ensure standards of accountability are upheld and that a clear, consistent vision is applied with a guaranteed capacity to deliver," he said. The recently announced Joint Commission on Indigenous Policy provided the vehicle for this to occur. This could be enhanced with support from state and territory governments, business leaders, academics, community workers and others, to ensure that its work is evidence-based and informed, he said.

"Once goals and targets have been set, government processes must be reformed and re-engineered to ensure that they are capable of meeting these challenges," he said. "The first step on this road to reform is mutual respect and partnerships."

DETAILS: Louise McDermott on (02) 9284 9851 or 0419 258 597.

SPEECHES: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/essentials/index.html

FACT SHEETS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) has released a series of fact sheets to assist university students, senior high school students and their teachers to understand human rights (22/2/08).

The fact sheets cover: Defining human rights, Human rights origins, Human rights philosophies, The emergence of rights in law, The international bill of rights, How states commit to human rights treaties, Australia and human rights treaties and Promoting and protecting human rights in the UN system. Case Studies information: Complaints about Australia to the Human Rights Committee, and Human Rights secondary sources reference list.

DETAILS: www.humanrights.gov.au/education/hr_explained/index.html

HREOC website/students section: www.humanrights.gov.au/info_for_students/index.html

UNHCR URGES APPROPRIATE PROCEDURES FOR CHRISTMAS ISLAND

UNHCR is urging the Rudd government to ensure that any continuation of offshore processing on Christmas Island is developed within the letter and the spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention, Richard Towle, UNHCR's Canberra-based regional representative, comments in the last and latest UNHCR Magazine (No 148 Issue 4).

"The prompt decision by the new government [of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd] to close the Nauru centre and bring the refugees to Australia is very welcome and shows Australia as a humane society in keeping with its international obligations," he said.

"We hope that the asylum procedures on Christmas Island will mirror those that apply to people who have gained access to Australia's onshore protection system," he said. "This would include appropriate reception arrangements that avoid detention if possible, a refugee status determination that includes independent appeal rights, and timely solutions in Australia for those found to be refugees."

ARTICLE: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/47b04d074.html> See also item in Articles in Focus.

US ETHICS OFFICE INVESTIGATES WATER-BOARDING

The US Justice Department has stated that its internal ethics office was investigating the department's legal approval for water-boarding of Qaeda suspects by the CIA and was likely to make public an unclassified version of its report. This was the first official acknowledgment of an internal review of the legal memorandums the department has issued since 2002 that authorised water-boarding and other interrogation methods, the New York Times reported (23/2/08).

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/23/washington/23justice.html?_r=1&th&emc+th&oref=slogin

CHINA WANTS TO TALK HUMAN RIGHTS WITH US

China wants to resume discussions - in limbo for five years - with the US on how to best improve human rights, Bloomberg reported (26/2/08). The move, which came as US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Beijing, appears to be part of China's efforts to stave off protests against its rights record during the Olympic Games. DETAILS:

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aGN2iMPzkMWM&refer=home>

AMNESTY CONDEMNS NIGERIAN PRISONS AS 'SCANDALOUS'

Fewer than half of prisoners doing time in Nigeria's overcrowded prisons have been convicted in court, and most of the detained have little opportunity to exercise their rights, Amnesty International said, Reuters reported (25/2/08).

DETAILS: <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL2471450520080226>

PERMANENT VISA GRANTED TO MR JOVICIC

Robert Jovicic has been granted a permanent visa by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans. Mr Jovicic was removed from Australia to Serbia in 2004 on character grounds after serving a prison term for burglary and theft charges. The former minister allowed him to return to Australia in 2006 after he became destitute and began sleeping on the steps of the Australian Embassy in Belgrade. Mr Jovicic first arrived in Australia with his parents in 1968, aged two, and had only visited Serbia once and does not speak the language. The Howard Government refused to grant Mr Jovicic a permanent visa to live in Australia until he became a Serbian citizen, issuing him with a temporary Special Purpose Visa. This left him in limbo, unable access Medicare and without any certainty of his future immigration status.

DETAILS: <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08018.htm>

BIOMETRICS TO PLAY KEY ROLE IN BORDER SECURITY

The increased use of biometrics will play an important role in protecting Australia's borders according to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans (26/2/08). Senator Evans said biometrics was a key tool in the fight against identity crime which could lead to unlawful entrants threatening Australia's border and visa processes.

Biometrics uses measurable biological characteristics to establish a unique identity for a person. Those characteristics are recorded and referred to for identification purposes. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) currently uses two biometrics – facial images and finger scans. These biometrics were being progressively rolled out to various immigration processes, including visa applications. Biometric equipment was also used to collect facial images and fingerprints from people in immigration detention and illegal foreign fishers.

He said finger scan identifications at the Northern Immigration Detention Centre in Darwin uncovered cases of illegal foreign fishers attempting to use multiple identities and earlier this month, biometrics helped to identify a Ukrainian backpacker who appeared in a Brisbane hospital with amnesia. An Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) report just released showed substantial improvements in the department's identity management capability.

Senator Evans said biometrics data would only be shared in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 and the disclosure provisions of the Migration Act 1958.

DETAILS: Simon Dowding on 02 6277 7860 or 0411 138 541.

E. HEALTH & MEANS

CALL TO LIMIT WORLD POPULATION AT 9 BILLION

The UN Foundation writes that three billion people - nearly half of the world's population - are under the age of 25. "In the next few years, those young people will make choices about sexuality and childbearing that will have a huge impact on their lives, their families and their communities. Collectively, their choices will help determine whether there are eight or nearly 12 billion of us by the middle of the century.

"But too many of those young people have limited sexual and reproductive health choices. In South Asia, nearly half of young women are married before the age of 18. 'Choice' about childbearing is meaningless to a 14 year-old girl who is married against her will. And, according to a 2003 study by UNPFA and the Guttmacher Institute, there are over 200 million women who

would like to limit or space their childbearing but lack access to reproductive health services and information.

“Meanwhile, the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned us that we have until 2015 - seven years - to stabilise greenhouse gas emissions, or face widespread ecological and humanitarian disaster. These two issues are connected. The number of people on the planet, and our systems of production and consumption, together determine our impact on the environment. Stabilising world population at nine rather than 12 billion would give us a fighting chance to avoid catastrophic climate change and other environmental crises.

“Yet, despite the connections between population and the environment, there is still little conversation and coordination between the traditional environmental movement and those working on population and reproductive health.

“It’s time to start a new conversation about population, reproductive health and the environment - one that captures the complexity - and the urgency - of the challenges before us. That’s why we’ve called together ‘new leaders’ to help figure out how to accomplish a huge task - to imagine a new world - one in which climate change is effectively addressed and reproductive and environmental justice are ensured.”

DETAILS: http://www.unfoundation.org/programs/women_pop/laurie_mazur_interview.asp
Better World Campaign: <http://www.ondayone.org/ideas?sort=video>

UN AGENCIES RALLY TO END FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Ten United Nations agencies have banded together to help eliminate the harmful practice of female genital mutilation within a generation, stressing the need for strong leadership and greater resources to protect the health and lives of millions of women and girls, the UN News Centre reported (27/2/08).

An estimated 3 million girls are at risk of undergoing the procedure – which involves the partial or total removal of external female genital organs – that some 140 million women, mostly in Asia, the Middle East and in Africa, have already endured.

In a statement, the agencies pledged to support governments and communities to abandon female genital mutilation, which remains widespread in many parts of the world, highlighting the damaging effects of the practice on the health of women, girls and newborn babies.

The agencies expressed their concern about the “medicalisation” of the practice, whereby it is performed by health professionals in health facilities, and the belief that it enhances a girl’s chastity and chances of marriage by controlling her sexuality.

“We recognise that traditions are often stronger than law, and legal action by itself is not enough,” they said. “Change must also come from within. This is why it is critical for us to join hands and work closely with communities and their leaders so that they can bring about sustainable social change.” DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25777&Cr=female&Cr1=>

TB RATES ‘HIGHEST RATES EVER’

Multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) has been recorded at the highest rates ever, according to a new World Health Organisation (WHO) report that presents findings from the largest survey to date on the scale of drug resistance in tuberculosis (25/2/08).

The report, *Anti-Tuberculosis Drug Resistance in the World*, is based on information collected between 2002 and 2006 on 90 000 TB patients in 81 countries. It also found that extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB), a virtually untreatable form of the respiratory disease, has been recorded in 45 countries.

The report also found a link between HIV infection and MDR-TB. Surveys in Latvia and Donetsk, Ukraine found nearly twice the level of MDR-TB among TB patients living with HIV compared with TB patients without HIV.

"TB drug resistance needs a frontal assault. If countries and the international community fail to address it aggressively now we will lose this battle," said Dr Mario Raviglione, director of the WHO Stop TB Department. "In addition to specifically confronting drug-resistant TB and saving lives, programs worldwide must immediately improve their performance in diagnosing all TB cases rapidly and treating them until cured, which is the best way to prevent the development of drug resistance." For the first time, the global survey includes analysis of XDR-TB. However, because few countries are equipped at present to diagnose it, limited data were available for this report.

WHO estimates that US\$4.8 billion is needed for overall TB control in low- and middle-income countries in 2008, with US\$1 billion for MDR-TB and XDR-TB. But there is a total financing gap of \$2.5 billion, including a US\$ 500 million gap for MDR-TB and XDR-TB.

NEIGHBOURLY HELP NEEDED TO COMBAT INCURABLE TB THREAT

Australia needs to increase support for other countries in our region to combat the threat of multi-drug resistant (MDR) and Extensively Drug Resistant (XDR) tuberculosis or run the risk of an epidemic of the virtually untreatable disease, according to ANU researchers (27/2/08).

The research team, lead by director of the Masters of Applied Epidemiology Program at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Professor Paul Kelly, has been studying the effects of TB in Indonesia for over 10 years, in collaboration with Indonesia's Ministry of Health. Indonesia ranks third in the world for the annual number of TB cases, with around 500,000 cases in 2006. The data is published in a report released by the World Health Organisation.

Although cases of drug resistant TB were relatively few in the study, Professor Kelly said that the threat to Australia was clear. Australia needed to play a bigger role in helping out regional neighbours in their battle against the potentially deadly disease, he said.

DETAILS: Martyn Pearce on 02 6125 5575/0416 249 245.

BEATING PREVENTABLE DISEASES

Leading world experts across health, urban design, private enterprise, government and law met in Sydney to consider the implications of the growing chronic disease epidemic, under the banner of the Oxford Health Alliance Summit this week (25/2/08).

The summit was examining the social and environmental causes and map solutions through workplace and urban design, as well as global policies and regulations, given that 60-per cent of the world's population is dying from chronic diseases – heart disease, diabetes, lung disease and many cancers - linked to poor diet, lack of exercise and tobacco and therefore largely preventable.

The Oxford Health Alliance (OxHA), is a public-private partnership committed to finding innovative solutions to the world's largest preventable health problem. It brings together experts and activists from different backgrounds to change behaviours, policies and perspectives at every level of society. DETAILS: Felicity Moffatt on +61 418 677 701 and felicity@healthpr.com

Website: www.oxha.org

LONG-TERM LIFT FROM ONLINE DEPRESSION WEBSITES

People who turn to online treatment sites to help with their depression are enjoying surprising long-term health benefits, according to a new report (27/2/08). Author Professor Andrew Mackinnon, Deputy Director of the ANU's Centre for Mental Health Research, conducted research over one year on the effects of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) websites and Information websites for people suffering depression. The paper, in the February issue of the

British Journal of Psychiatry, found that even after one year both types of website still had a significant positive effect. DETAILS: Martyn Pearce on 02 6125 5575 / 0416 249 245.

ANTI-CHOICE GROUPS 'FUNDED AT SIX TIMES RATE OF PRO-CHOICE'

It was revealed in Senate Estimates that last year the Federal Government gave nearly \$1,395,305 million to anti-choice organisations to provide pregnancy counselling, but only \$227,578 to pro-choice organisations, said Greens Senator Kerry Nettle, this week.

"It is appalling that federal funding for pregnancy counselling is given so generously to anti-choice organisations," she said. "The Rudd Government must ensure that pregnancy counselling funding goes to organisations that provide information on all options and don't have a particular ideological point of view to push." DETAILS: Max Phillips on 0414 338 526.

FOOD

SOARING PRICES ENDANGER WORLD FOOD PROGRAM

The World Food Program has launched talks on how it best should adjust its aid strategy as food prices continue to soar, the Financial Times (25/2/08). The UN agency hopes it will get more donations to make up for the higher costs, but has a back-up plan to halt some aid in case of lacking sufficient donations. REPORT:

http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/451604c4-e30b-11dc-803f-0000779fd2ac.html?nclick_check=1

COUNTRIES 'MUST SUPPORT WFP': Those governments such as the US that use a lot a grain for bio-fuels - a factor in driving up food prices - must take responsibility for their actions and ramp up their donations to the World Food Program, the Financial Times urges (25/2/08).

ARTICLE: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/cfe4dab4-e3d6-11dc-8799-0000779fd2ac.html>

GLOBAL MALNUTRITION EFFORTS FALL SHORT

Governments are failing to invest enough money to prevent and treat malnutrition among women and children in poor countries, nutritionists warn, The IRIN News reported (22/2/08). The lack of funding is projected to increase the number of malnourished children by 5.9 million in the world's 10 poorest countries between 2005 and 2015.

DETAILS: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76890>

UNFAO TOUTS TOOL TO HELP NATIONS FOOD V. FUEL

The UN Food and Agricultural Organisation says a new tool could help countries that use grains for bio-fuel to make more informed decisions in order not to excessively hurt food supply, IRIN News reported (25/2/08). As more countries weigh the pros and cons of biofuel production, a new decision-support tool has been developed to ensure they do not compromise their food production and security. The Bioenergy and Food Security Modelling Analytical Framework (AF) is designed to identify whether the potential to develop a bio-energy industry exists in a particular country, and provide policy support, said Alexander Müller, Assistant Director-General for natural resources and the environment at the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

DETAILS: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76937>

F. OTHER NEWS

WOMEN URGED TO PUT HAND UP FOR AUSTRALIA 2020 SUMMIT

Women of all ages and backgrounds should step up and nominate for representation at the Prime Minister's Australia 2020 summit being held in April, Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick said (27/2/08).

Women interested in nominating for the Australia 2020 summit should nominate by close of business this Friday, February 29 by going to: www.australia2020.gov.au

RUSSIAN FREEDOM OF SPEECH 'SHRINKING'

Russian freedom of speech is "shrinking alarmingly" under President Vladimir Putin, says Amnesty International, the BBC reported (26/2/08). The murders of outspoken journalists go unsolved, independent media outlets have been shut and police have attacked opposition protesters, said the report. 'Arbitrary' laws were curbing the right to express opinion and silencing NGOs deemed to be a threat by the authorities. Russia's presidential elections will take place on March 2. REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7264033.stm>

POLITICAL DONATIONS 'TIME TO VANQUISH VENALITY'

Last week the Australian Democrats wrote to Special Minister of State Senator John Faulkner, urging him to initiate major improvements to Australia's funding and disclosure rules.

"Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's confirmation this week that federal Labor is committed to much better funding and disclosure laws is very welcome," said Senator Andrew Murray, Democrats electoral matters spokesperson. "The first priority is to urgently repeal the worst provisions of the misnamed Electoral Integrity Bill of 2006. That Bill undermined the franchise, weakened disclosure rules and reduced accountability."

He said the Democrats' reform agenda includes: banning donations with 'strings attached'; reducing the disclosure threshold to \$1000; closing the loophole that allows multiple donations, each just below the disclosure level, which can be made to the separate federal, state and territory divisions of the same political party; prohibiting foreign donations unless made by individual Australian citizens living offshore and ensuring disclosure of those who donate anonymously via clubs, foundations and trusts

DETAILS: Senator Murray on 089 481 1455/04199 58038.

CHARTERS TO PROTECT INDEPENDENCE OF PUBLIC RESEARCH AGENCIES

Speaking at a forum organised by the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr, re-iterated the value the Rudd Government placed on scientific research and confirmed that the government would introduce new charters for public research agencies to better define their intellectual freedoms and responsibilities (22/2/08).

"Science and research are central to Australia's future prosperity and social well-being. These charters will remove the doubt and uncertainty that has existed in the past," he said. "The charters will clearly and unequivocally articulate the rights and responsibilities of public research agencies in representing the findings of their research and participating in robust, open and free public debate.

"Scientific analysis lies at the very heart of good policy making and good government. The charters will ensure that scientific findings play a key role in the important decisions we make about Australia's future," he said. DETAILS: Patrick Pantano, Minister's Office on 0417 181 936.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING TIES WITH VIETNAM

Education and training ties between Australia and Vietnam will be strengthened following the signing of a cooperative agreement by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, and Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education and Training, Professor Nguyen Thien Nhan, this week. The renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Education and Training between Australia and Vietnam coincides with the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries by the Whitlam Government in 1973. DETAILS:

<http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/gillard/releases/australiaandvietnamreneweducati onpartnership.htm>

EXPERTS MAP ECONOMIC INTEGRATION FOR ASIA

Key policy makers and business leaders from Asia were invited to a Sydney symposium on Monday, organised by the Australian National University and the Japan External Trade

Organization (JETRO) to introduce the work of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA).

The symposium – *The Roadmap Towards Economic Integration in East Asia: The future roles for Australia and Japan* – was seen as a first opportunity in Australia to hear about the progress of the work of ERIA, an institute formed on the recommendation of heads of government at the ASEAN summit in Singapore last year.

The institute is backed and financed by the Japanese Government and includes a network of prestigious think tanks from each of the 16 countries in ASEAN. The Australian contribution comes from the Australia-Japan Research Centre (AJRC) at the ANU Crawford School of Economics and Government.

ERIA was formed to conduct high quality policy-oriented research to assist the ASEAN Secretariat and the East Asia Summit countries to work towards closer regional cooperation and integration. In the first round of research work conducted by ERIA, the ANU contributed a study on services trade liberalisation which grew out of an Australian Research Council project at AJRC. PROGRAM: <http://www.jetro.go.jp/australia.events/upcomng>
DETAILS: Martyn Pearce on 02 6125 5575 0416 249 245.

IT'S OUR HOUSE POSTER COMPETITION

Primary school students have the chance to win cash prizes for their school by designing a poster as part of the celebrations for the 20th anniversary of the opening of Parliament House in Canberra in 1988. Primary schools and their classes are being invited to design a poster using the slogan 'It's Our House' somewhere in their design. The winners will be judged on originality, creativity and entertainment value with prizes of \$2000, \$1000 and \$500 for their schools. Winning entries will also be put on display this year at the Parliament House Open Day on May 10 and also on the Open Day website.

DETAILS: http://www.aph.gov.au/OpenDay/Poster_Comp.pdf or ring freecall 1800 139 299. Send entries in by **Wednesday April 30** to: Liaison and Projects Office, House of Representatives, PO Box 6021, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600
Open Day details: <http://www.aph.gov.au/OpenDay/index.htm>

G. MEDIA MATTERS

AUSTRALIAN DEPORTED FROM FIJI

Fiji's deportation of newspaper publisher and managing director, Russell Hunter, to Australia on February 26 after his paper published stories highlighting allegations of tax evasion by a government minister, has been condemned by International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

It was claimed Mr Hunter was held overnight before being forced on to a flight to Sydney without being able to notify his family. An Australian, it is understood his work visa had 18 months to run but the Fiji Government issued a statement saying Mr Hunter was a "prohibited immigrant" and was deported because he had contravened the conditions of his work permit and that his conduct threatened national security (27/2/08)..

The Department of Foreign Affairs has protested, describing the incident as "totally unacceptable". Minister for Foreign Affairs Stephen Smith said it appeared to be another move by the illegal Fiji interim government to muzzle freedom of speech.

"It's a worrying development because we would like to be helping Fiji towards elections at the end of March next year and to clamp down on freedom of speech is a movement away, not a movement towards, democracy," said NZ Prime Minister Helen Clark on a visit to Australia.

Mr Hunter, who has lived in Fiji for about 10 years, said he was not afraid for his own safety but was worried about his wife and daughter, 13, left in Fiji but due to join him shortly.

Fiji's Pacific Centre for Public Integrity condemned the decision to deport Mr Hunter. "This latest threat against media freedom demonstrates the desperation of an unlawful regime to prevent the public from hearing the truth about the corrupt practices of its members," its chief, Angie Heffernan, told the *Fiji Times*.

Mr Bainimarama issued a statement saying media freedoms were "secure and guaranteed" in Fiji. However, "The performance of the media recently leaves much to be desired. Some of its reporting has been inciteful [sic] and destabilising and therefore a threat to national security and stability." The stories at the centre of the dispute concerned tax evasion allegations against Finance Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, a former prime minister.

INFORMATION: Sydney Morning Herald at:

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/fiji-deports-newspaper-publisher/2008/02/26/1203788346998.html> and IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

SOUTH AFRICAN BLACKS-ONLY RULE 'NOTHING WRONG'

"I saw nothing wrong," said ANC president Jacob Zuma when asked whether he approved of the exclusion of white journalists from an address at the Forum of Black Journalists (FBJ), IOL reported (22/2/08). Mr Zuma was addressing journalists after the FBJ re-launch in Johannesburg. Asked his opinion, he replied it was a question for the forum.

Abbey Makoe, FBJ steering committee chairman, was reported to have accused white journalists of "stage managing" and causing a "total commotion" before Mr Zuma arrived. The forum provides an opportunity for African, Indian and Coloured journalists to "engage in healthy debate" about common interests, Mr Makoe said on Thursday. ARTICLE:

http://www.int.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=nw20080222161407773C358366

EAST TIMOR GOVERNMENT REGRETS ATTACK ON JOURNALIST

A commitment by the East Timor Government to ensure attacks on the media, such as a military police assault on a staff member of the *East Timor Post* at the weekend, would not occur again, was welcomed by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) (27/2/08).

Senior layout editor Agustinho Ta Pasea suffered cuts and bruises after being beaten and arrested by military police on Saturday as he took a computer file of the paper's weekend edition to the printers in Dili, it was reported.

Ta Pasea said he was stopped at 2am on February 23, beaten by military police and taken to a police station where he was assaulted again. Ta Pasea was reportedly held for 11 hours for breaking Dili's 10pm-6am curfew.

De Araujo said he had lodged a formal complaint with police and the government of Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao.

East Timor's Secretariat of State Security has issued a formal apology on behalf of the government for the use of "unjustified force", and said the security forces would ensure incidents of this kind are not repeated. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

AFGHANISTAN - JOURNALISTS CONTINUALLY UNDER THREAT

Five journalists were threatened with guns by security officials outside the Balkh prison as the Deputy Minister for Commerce and Industries, Zia-u-din Zia, visited on February 18, the Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA) reported (22/2/08). All five journalists were clearly identified as press members.

The AIJA also reported that the *Kabul Shahan* weekly was forced to relocate its offices after the newspaper's owner, Sidiqullah Sahil, received a letter signed by the Taliban Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in December, accusing him of being a spy. He was threatened with death.

There are also grave concerns for the well-being of Javid Ahmad, a journalist working for Canadian Television (CTV) who is being held at Bagram Air Base. He was detained by US military forces in October 2007 without charge. The International Federation of Journalists has demanded that US military forces provide adequate evidence of the reasons for Mr Ahmad's detention or release him immediately. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

AUSTRALIANS SEEK RELEASE OF AFGHAN JOURNALIST

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, an affiliate of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), have called on the Australian Government to make a high-level representation to the Afghanistan Government and President Harmid Karzai to repeal the death sentence on journalist Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh (26/2/08).

Mr Kambakhsh, a journalism student and reporter for the daily newspaper *Jahan-e Naw*, was arrested last October and charged with blasphemy for downloading material from the internet on women's rights, and allegedly distributing the materials.

The alliance and the ACTU said the court's decision and harsh sentence showed an alarming disregard for the right to freedom of expression and a fair trial despite Afghanistan's constitutional commitment to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. IFJ affiliates around the world are asking home governments to call on Afghanistan's leaders to overturn the sentence and institute reform of the legal system to ensure such judgments could not be applied in future.

DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919

NEPAL - NEWSPAPER VEHICLE TORCHED

The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) reported that a Kantipur Publications vehicle, containing 8000 copies of *Kantipur* and *The Kathmandu Post* dailies was torched in the eastern region of Nepal (22/2/08). According to a vice-president of the FNJ, Sanjaya Santoshi Rai, the vehicle was stopped by a dozen assailants who then set fire to it. The driver and distributor were immobilised by the group and their mobile phones taken. This latest attack follows 22 cases of physical harassment of journalists so far this year.

According to the NFJ, Jhapa-based editors and publishers closed six dailies and 12 weeklies on February 22 as an indefinite program of strikes, led by the United Democratic Madheshi Front (UDMF) and the Federal Republic National Front (FRNF) entered its second week. "We are unable to get the necessary materials for printing and distribution like paper, ink, fuel, electricity," said FNJ local president Krishna Humagain. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919

H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

PUTIN'S IRON GRIP ON RUSSIA SUFFOCATES HIS OPPONENTS

Shortly before parliamentary elections in December, foremen at the GAZ vehicle factory in Nizhny Novgorod, pulled aside assembly-line workers and ordered them to vote for President Putin's party or else, according to the New York Times (24/2/08). Around the same time, volunteers for an opposition party, the Union of Right Forces, received hundreds of calls at all hours, warning them to stop working for their candidates. Otherwise they and their family would be hurt, they warned. ARTICLE: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/24/world/europe/24putin.html?th&emc=th>

DEMOLITIONS CONTINUE ON SHAKY GROUND

The farmers of Beit Ula spent two years preparing their new groves of fruit and nut and olive trees, clearing rocks, building stone terraces and digging deep cisterns to catch the scarce rainwater. It took the Israeli Army less than a day to destroy it, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (23/2/08). The Israeli military's Civil Administration section subsequently said it demolished the terraces as they were built illegally on Israeli land - a surprise to the West Bank farmers, who brandished documents with Palestinian, Israeli and even Turkish stamps which, they said, proved their land title. ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/22/1203467389018.html>

RAÚL CASTRO GIVES SIGNALS THAT CUBA WILL CHANGE

In his first public act as president, Raúl Castro, 76, met on Tuesday not with leftist Latin American leaders like President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, nor with Chinese officials, but with the Vatican's secretary of state, the emissary of a traditional enemy of communism and a critic of Cuba's record on human rights, the International Herald Tribune reported (26/2/08). Most Cubans seem unwilling to believe it yet, but there are reasons to think a turning point has come and Raúl Castro plans to chart a different course for the communist state than his older brother, Fidel. ARTICLE: <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/02/26/america/cuba.php>

GOVERNMENTS IGNORE PROBLEM

The eye in the sky does not lie, reports the Sydney Morning Herald (25/2/08). Satellite photographs of thousands of kilometres of man-made levees, channels and tanks reveal what state and federal governments have failed to come to grips with for three decades. "This is the elephant in the room," said the report's co-author, Richard Kingsford. "You can't deal with the desecration of the Murray-Darling basin and not deal with the floodplains." This summer's rains have brought relief but have not solved the long-term problems. The report, *Floodplain Development And Vegetation Health On The Macquarie River*, says half of the river Redgums were dead at more than 20 per cent of the sites surveyed where earthworks had taken place. ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/02/24/1203788147736.html>

FORMER CHIEF PROSECUTOR AT GUANTÁNAMO BAY BECOMES A CHIEF CRITIC

Until four months ago, Colonel Morris Davis was the chief prosecutor at Guantánamo Bay and the most colorful champion of the Bush administration's military commission system, reports the International Herald Tribune (28/2/08). He once said sympathy for detainees was nauseating and compared putting them on trial to dragging "Dracula out into the sunlight. Then in October he had a dispute with his boss, a general. According to the newspaper, ever since, he has been one of those critics who will not go away ... Still in the military, he has irritated the administration, asserting in articles and interviews that Pentagon officials interfered with prosecutors, exerted political pressure and approved the use of evidence obtained by torture. ARTICLE: <http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/02/28/america/gitmo.php>

MUSHARRAF: PAKISTAN HAS DEMOCRACY IN SIGHTS

Monday's parliamentary vote in Pakistan was "free, fair, transparent and peaceful," and was a milestone in the country's journey towards democracy, President Pervez Musharraf writes in The Washington Post. Pakistan now has three overriding goals, he writes: winning the fight against terrorism, establishing democracy, and promoting economic development, in the Washington Post (22/2/08). ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/21/AR2008022102158.html>

MORE BEDTIME READING FOR POLLIES

As if new and old senators and members of parliament didn't have enough to absorb on their first day back to school, the Parliamentary Library has listed for them 100 recent articles and reviews to read to round out their education. We publish only a selection that has either direct or indirect relation to Australia's obligations and responsibilities as a member of the UN. Copies can be obtained through your senators' or member's electorate office – **Ian Mathews**.

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