

# 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.

March 14 2008

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Editor: Judy Cannon - 07 3358 2623

Email: [judycnna@yahoo.com.au](mailto:judycnna@yahoo.com.au)

Contributing Editor: Ian Mathews - 02 6281 4025

Email: [ian.mathews7@bigpond.com](mailto:ian.mathews7@bigpond.com)

Unity and Supplement can also be accessed at: <http://www.unityunaa.info/>

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

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## A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES

### US CAMPAIGN CALLS ON BUSH TO PAY \$1.5 BILLION DEBT TO UN

It did not make sense then that the US was failing to honour its commitments to the UN which helps share the costs of peace and security," the US Better World Campaign said in a campaign statement this week.

"President Bush recently proposed a budget request for next year that would dramatically underfund the United Nations," BWC said. "Despite the fact that the US is asking the UN to take on a growing number of peacekeeping missions - saving American resources and lives - the President's budget shortchanges UN peacekeeping by \$600 million".

It was necessary for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Congress to get the message that the US failing to pay UN dues on time and in full undermined US interests "and hurts our image in the world," BWC said.

Asking supporters to write to the US Congress to support full UN funding, BWC said last year lobbying had achieved an increase in funding for UN peacekeeping of \$600 million.

"The US has agreed to pay our fair share at the United Nations, but we are failing to honour our commitments. Even as the UN effectively pursues US interests by securing peace in places like Haiti and Sudan, the US was now \$1.5 billion in debt to the UN." ([the U.S. is now \\$1.5 billion in debt to the UN.](#))

If the debt continued to grow, US standing in the world would be undermined further and life-saving peacekeeping missions jeopardised. The total yearly cost of UN peacekeeping to the US was less than what America paid for three days in Iraq. Fully funding the United Nations was in both US economic and security interests, BWC said.

DETAILS: [www.BetterWorldCampaign.org](http://www.BetterWorldCampaign.org)

### BAN IS A WARRIOR FOR UN EFFICIENCY

Fifteen months into his job as the world's top diplomat, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has earned a reputation as a stubborn fighter for a more efficient UN, the Christian Science Monitor reports. He is pushing for actions that prevent conflicts from breaking out, realising it is much better than trying to enforce peace afterwards, and aggressively advocating solutions to big problems such as climate change. [The Christian Science Monitor](#) (12/3/08).

### FALTERING SUPPORT HAMPERS PEACEKEEPING

The international community's often faltering support for UN peacekeeping operations was making it difficult to maintain gains in key conflict areas, even though the UN has greatly boosted its operations in this field, top UN officials have warned (11/3/08).

"A serious failure in one of our missions would be enough to put at risk the credibility of the whole of peacekeeping, which we have worked so hard to restore over the past few years," Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, [told](#) the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations yesterday.

The Department of Peacekeeping Operations ([DPKO](#)) is now managing 20 operations, involving nearly 130,000 authorised military, police and civilian personnel. In Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Timor-Leste and elsewhere, great strides were being made, he said. In some countries, however, "at the very moment when international assistance is most needed, the attention of the world is waning."

He said the extension of state authority and political dialogue in Afghanistan, as well as security gains in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), would suffer without coherent, strategic engagement.

In Sudan, a lack of key support for the hybrid African Union-UN operation in Darfur ([UNAMID](#)) – including critical air and ground transport, diplomatic and political engagement with the parties – was exacerbating the operational difficulties the mission already faced due to the region’s remote and inhospitable terrain.

In addition, the recent temporary relocation of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea ([UNMEE](#)) from the latter country was seriously challenging the Security Council's authority.

“It is clear to me that peacekeeping works best when the membership shares a common vision, remains engaged with national actors and views the peace operation as a common endeavour of the international community,” he said.

#### **GROUP: UN PEACEKEEPING SOMETIMES TOO AMBITIOUS**

The UN Security Council sometimes too quickly approves new, big peacekeeping missions without solid peace agreements in place, the New York University-based Center on International Cooperation said on Wednesday in its annual review of global peace operations. The centre specifically points to Darfur, where it says the blue helmets' mission faced difficulties from the start because of Sudan's resistance. [Financial Times \(free registration\)](#) (11/3/08).

#### **US GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS OPPOSE WORLD BANK PLAN**

US Government officials have joined ranks with international business organisations to oppose a World Bank plan which would allow developing countries to use their own individual contracting rules for World Bank-funded projects for infrastructure and rural development. [The Washington Times](#) (12/3/08).

#### **VETERAN TO HANDLE LEBANON TRIBUNAL**

A veteran of numerous international court proceedings, Robin Vincent, of the United Kingdom, has been appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as the Registrar of the tribunal being set up to try those responsible for political killings in [Lebanon](#), particularly the 2005 attack that killed former prime minister Rafiq Hariri (11/3/08).

From 2002 to 2005, Mr Vincent served as Registrar of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL). Since then, he has served as the temporary deputy registrar of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and has advised on the establishment of other international tribunals, including the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) and the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

The Security Council set up the International Independent Investigation Commission (IIIC) in April 2005 after an earlier UN mission found that Lebanon’s own inquiry into the Hariri assassination was seriously flawed and that Syria was primarily responsible for the political tensions that preceded the attack. Mr. Hariri died in a massive car bombing in Beirut in February 2005 that also took the lives of 22 others - UN News Centre report.

#### **UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS RESIGNS**

Louise Arbour, 61, has confirmed that she is to resign from her position as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and will leave office on June 30 (10/3/08).

Reacting to the news, Amnesty International paid tribute to her achievements and Martin Macpherson, director of Amnesty’s International Law and Organisations Program, called on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to ensure that her successor was of a similar high international standard with a proven track-record as a strong and independent advocate for human rights.

As High Commissioner for Human Rights since 2004, Louise Arbour had been a forceful and formidable advocate for human rights protection, stressing the need to apply and enforce legal obligations and establish accountability for the perpetrators of human rights violations, he said.

Ms Arbour's office deploys nearly 400 human rights monitors in UN peacekeeping missions in hotspots such as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Her office is independent but works closely with the UN Human Rights Council.

Her forthright candour has prompted criticism around the world, but she brushed this off as "inevitable", Reuters reported. However, she scolded some council members for going too far in criticising her and her staff by impeaching their integrity or alleging "bias, hypocrisy, insubordination or dereliction of duty" as being "outside the acceptable range," Fox News stated.

Ms Arbour won international acclaim for indicting former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic in 1999 when she was chief prosecutor in The Hague. She is the second high-ranking UN official this week to announce plans to step down. Peacekeeping chief Jean-Marie Guehenno, of France, said he would end eight years on the job shortly.

### **HANDBOOK ON CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION**

As the number and scale of humanitarian responses to both natural disasters and conflicts keeps rising, the UN and the European Commission have [launched](#) a new handbook to help humanitarian staff coordinate with military forces during emergency operations (11/3/08). The *UN Civil-Military Coordination Officer Field Handbook* seeks to provide those working in the field with information to help carry out their tasks.

"Coordination between civilian and military actors is often essential during an emergency response," said John Holmes, who serves as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and as Emergency Relief Coordinator. He noted that the new guidelines would help aid workers ensure that coordination was effective and based on internationally recognised principles and guidelines. The EC funded the workshop and preparatory work for the handbook.

## **B. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENT**

### **EARTH HOUR MARCH 29 - THE BIG SWITCH OFF**

On March 29 at 8pm cities across the world are planning to turn off their lights for one hour sending a powerful global message that it's possible to take action on global warming. The World Wildlife Fund says that Earth Hour is catching on across America following the tremendous success of last year's event in Sydney. For 2008 Earth Hour people around the world are invited to turn off their lights for an hour on March 29 at 8pm local time.

The phenomenon is expected to spread across six continents in 2008 to include the world's major capital cities, such as Copenhagen, Toronto, Chicago, Melbourne, Brisbane and Tel Aviv.

Created to take a stand against the greatest threat our planet has ever faced, Earth Hour on March 31 2007 saw 2.2 million people and 2100 Sydney businesses turned off their lights for one hour. This massive collective effort reduced Sydney's energy consumption by 10.2 per cent for one hour, which is the equivalent effect of taking 48,000 cars off the road for a year.

With Sydney icons like the Harbour Bridge and Opera House turning their lights off, and unique events such as weddings by candlelight, the world took notice, inspired by the collective effort of millions of Sydneysiders, organisers said. They hope with many major global cities joining in Earth Hour 2008, it will turn a symbolic event into a [global movement](#)/  
<http://www.earthhour.org/about/supporters/>

DETAILS: [Frequently Asked Questions](#); [interactive supporter map](#); check where countries rank on [live ranking table](#); <http://earthhour.org/user/da3U>

CONTACT: Carly Hall, social planning & research consultant, Urbis, Australia Asia Middle East on +617 3007 3800 Fax +617 3007 3811; [www.urbis.com.au](http://www.urbis.com.au)

## US AGENCIES WARN OF RISING SEA THREAT

Reports from various US government agencies have warned of problems along the US coasts because of rising seas caused by global warming and that crucial infrastructure, such as airports, roads and railways, all face threats from rising water levels, [The New York Times](#) (12/3/08).

## COULD CANBERRA BE A CARBON NEUTRAL CAPITAL?

The Switch to Green Expo and Conference to be held at the National Convention Centre over April 4/5 is to focus on making Canberra a carbon neutral capital.

To be opened by Jon Stanhope, Chief Minister of the ACT Government, the conference will be co-hosted by the United Nations Association of Australia, the ACT Government, Canberra Business Council, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the Conservation Council.

The distinct perspectives of the five co-hosts are expected to create a comprehensive approach to ensure that the ACT region is a 'green leader' in climate change action. Talking of the forthcoming conference, Russell Rollason, ACT UNAA president, said, "UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon reminded the international community in Bali late last year that climate change is the moral challenge of our generation and succeeding generations depend on us; we cannot rob our children of their future.

"Closer to home, a Treasury alert to Prime Minister, Mr Kevin Rudd, identified climate change as 'the single most pressing environmental, economic and social challenge this country faces'. Urgent action to reduce carbon emissions is needed at all levels internationally and in Australia, and this event will provide a critical opportunity to identify what we can do now in the ACT and surrounding region," Mr Rollason said.

"There is a high level of awareness in the community that the climate is changing but also frustration and confusion over what could or should be done and what individuals can do," Mr Stanhope, Chief Minister, ACT Government, commented. "Resolving the problem should not be the responsibility of any one sector in the community. The problem is shared and so too must be the solution. This is why the 'Switch to Green Expo & Conference' should be supported."

Speakers will include: Dr David Mills, founder and chairman of Californian based Ausra, one of the world's largest solar companies; Katie Patrick, CEO/founder of Green Pages Australia, a leading eco directory; Molly Harriss Olson, director of EcoFutures, an Australian-based international policy firm; Trish Harrup, community campaigner and director of the Conservation Council; Dr Penny Whetton, stream leader for Climate Impacts and Risk, CSIRO, Professor Will Steffen, director of the Institute for Environment, ANU; and Dr Peter Newman, Curtin University, author of *Sustainability and Cities : Overcoming Automobile Dependence and international authority on sustainable cities*. Sue Hall, CEO of Climate Neutral Business Network USA, and 2003 Business Woman of the Year, will also attend.

## ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

### BAN WARNS ON HIGH FOOD COSTS AND AFRICAN NEED FOR BETTER PRODUCTIVITY

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said he was deeply concerned about the sharp rise in global food prices, the BBC reported (11/3/08). He said the trend would hinder progress towards the millennium development goals (MDGs), which aim to halve extreme poverty by 2015.

The UN World Food Program (WFP) and other agencies may be forced to ration food aid, he said. However, it was possible shortages might be eased by a "green revolution" to transform farming methods in Africa.

Global food prices have risen by 40 per cent in nine months and food reserves were at their lowest for 30 years. The WFP is facing a \$500m (£248m) shortfall in its attempts to feed 73 million people this year.

The change has been blamed on poor harvests, population growth, rising energy and grain prices, the effects of climate change and a shift to bio-fuel crops. Although one UN official had called the increasing use of crops for fuel rather than food a crime against humanity, Mr Ban said the positive and negative aspects of bio-fuels had to be balanced.

After chairing the second meeting of a MDG Africa Steering Group in New York, Mr Ban urged for scaled-up action to raise agricultural productivity across Africa (10/3/08), saying "Tremendous gains are possible if the international community translates commitment to deliverables." Achievement included Malawi's lowering of child mortality rates, Senegal's accomplishments in enhancing water and sanitation facilities and Tanzania's improvements in primary education. DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25915&Cr=MDG&Cr1=>

### **AUSTRALIA GATHERS SUPPORT OVER JAPANESE WHALING**

Australia has drummed up international support for its bid to stop Japanese whaling with new rules protecting whales, at a London meeting, according to the Melbourne Age (9/3/08). Delegates came from 46 countries, including Japan, Britain, the US, Norway and New Zealand. The Australian delegation to the International Whaling Commission called for special permits to come under IWC scrutiny to prevent Japan killing whales in the name of science. The IWC has criticised US-based anti-whaling group the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society over its actions to stop Japanese whalers in the Southern Ocean. Japan argues whaling is part of its culture and kills up to 1,000 whales a year for research, with some meat sold in supermarkets. REPORT: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/world/australia-gathers-antiwhaling-support/2008/03/09/1204998256855.html>

### **GLOBAL TIGER POPULATION DWINDLING, WWF WARNS**

Only some 3,500 tigers may be left around the world, about half the number compared to 25 years ago, the World Wildlife Fund said. Worst faring may be the South China Tiger, which is seriously threatened with extinction, WWF conservationists said at a conference in Sweden. However, tigers could make a comeback if humans took proper actions. [BBC](#) (12/3/08).

### **ROYAL JELLY MAKES BEE QUEENS**

New ANU research may explain why eating royal jelly destines honeybee larvae to become queens instead of workers – and in the process adds new weight to the role of environmental factors in the nature/nurture divide. Scientists from the ANU Research School of Biological Sciences discovered that a copious diet of royal jelly flicks a genetic switch in young bees that determines whether they'll become a queen, or live a life of drudgery. Their findings are published in the latest *Science* journal. DETAILS: Simon Couper on 02 6125 4171/ 0416 249 241.

### **NATIVE ANIMALS 'IN NEED OF PROTECTION'**

A new report from the Worldwide Fund for Nature has warned that Australian native animals are protected in just ten per cent of the country's land area. The key concern raised by this report is that the biodiversity hotspots already identified are still the least protected, whilst 72 per cent of Australia's threatened species continue to decline. The Australian Greens called on the Federal Government to take immediate action to ensure the protection of biodiversity hotspots in Australia (12/3/08).

"Senate Estimates recently revealed that \$6 million set aside for purchasing land to protect biodiversity hotspots has not been spent and will be handed back to Treasury," Senator Rachel Siewert said. "This money was meant to be used to buy high conservation-value properties in Australia's biodiversity 'hotspots' - areas where there is a great concentration of unique wildlife."

DETAILS: Chris Twomey on 0407 725 025; [senator.siewert@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.siewert@aph.gov.au); and <http://www.rachelsiewert.org.au>

## C. PEACE & SECURITY

### **UN ON AFGHANISTAN: ANTI-GOVERNMENT ELEMENTS 'FAR FROM DEFEATED'**

The political transition in strife-torn Afghanistan continues to face a number of serious challenges, including terrorism and a booming drug industry, according to a new UN report, which urges an integrated approach among international partners to stabilise it, UN News reported (10/3/08).

"The Taliban and related armed groups and the drug economy represent fundamental threats to still fragile political, economic and social institutions," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon writes in his latest [report](#) to the Security Council on Afghanistan. "Despite tactical successes by national and international military forces, the anti-government elements are far from defeated."

The report notes that 36 out of the country's 376 districts, including most districts in the east, south-east and south, remain largely inaccessible to Afghan officials and aid workers. This hindered the delivery of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable people, a situation exacerbated by the harsh weather conditions of the past few months.

Other challenges included poor governance and limited progress on human rights, as noted by UN High Commissioner for [Human Rights](#) Louise Arbour during her November 2007 visit. "Some continue to argue that human rights contradict local traditions and were a 'luxury' Afghanistan could not afford," the report says.

### **UN PEACEKEEPING CHIEF CALLS FOR AFGHAN MANDATE TO BE SHARPENED**

The mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) must be sharpened given the challenges the country faced in the past year, including a more resilient than expected insurgency and a booming drug industry, the UN's top peacekeeping official said (12/3/08).

Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told an open debate of the Security Council that the insurgency is "more ruthless than we ever imagined," and that "a massive illegal drug economy thrives in the vacuum of state authority."

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25946&Cr=afghan&Cr1=>

### **CALL FOR MORE AUSTRALIAN POLICE IN PNG**

Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Michael Somare, has called for Australia to deploy up to 300 police to tackle his country's high levels of violent crime and corruption, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (10/3/08).

In an interview with the *Herald*, Sir Michael said a visit by the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd last week had led to a dramatic improvement in relations and had paved the way for a deal to redeploy Australian police across PNG. A proposal on the deployment would be considered by Australian and PNG ministers in Madang next month.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/09/1204998283823.html>

### **DARFUR BURNS AS VIOLENCE SWELLS**

Violence has once again engulfed Darfur, with humanitarian agencies accusing government-backed troops of burning western villages. The renewed violence, which is viewed as an attempt by the government to reassert control over territory controlled by rebel groups, has forced thousands more villagers to flee. [The Independent \(London\)](#) (11/3/08).

**RUSSIA PUSHES UN FOR DARFUR REBEL GROUP SANCTIONS:** Russian diplomats are advocating that Security Council sanctions be applied to rebel groups in Darfur over their failure to abide by the terms of a 2007 ceasefire agreement. [AlertNet.org/Reuters](#) (11/3/08).

## MIDDLE EAST

### **CYPRIOIS AGREE TO DIRECT UN TALKS**

The Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders have agreed to hold direct talks under United Nations auspices in Nicosia on March 21, the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) [announced](#) (12/3/08).

Senior aides to Dimitris Christofias and Mehmet Ali Talat agreed to the talks at a meeting hosted by Michael Møller, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Cyprus, according to the UNFICYP news release. The meeting will take place in the UN Protected Area in Nicosia.

Mr. Møller described the encounter between George Iacovou and Ozdil Nami, aides to Mr. Christofias and Mr. Talat respectively, as "in a very cordial and constructive atmosphere."

The aides "reached a great degree of convergence on the issues discussed, including on the possible future opening of the Ledra Street crossing" in Nicosia, UNFICYP said.

[UNFICYP](#) was established in March 1964 following the outbreak of inter-communal violence. The mission was give the job of preventing a recurrence of fighting, contributing to the maintenance and restoration of law and order and a return to normal conditions.

### **WAR WITH IRAN PLAN DENIED**

The White House denied that a rift over Iran cost the commander of US forces in the Middle East his job and said no one inside the US Government was even suggesting war against Tehran, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (13/3/08).

But spokeswoman Dana Perino said US President George W Bush could not rule out using force in the dispute over the Islamic republic's nuclear program because that "helps make diplomacy work and make it more effective". "It's true that the president has not taken any option off the table, but no commander-in-chief would ever do that and be representing America well," she said.

But "there's no one in the administration that is suggesting anything other than a diplomatic approach to Iran," she said. Admiral William Fallon resigned after media reports that he had broken with Mr Bush's strategy.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/13/1205126053179.html>

### **ISRAEL HOUSING: BAN KI-MOON CALLS FOR HALT**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the Israeli Government to halt the expansion of settlements after it approved the resumption of the construction of 750 housing units in Givat Zeev in the West Bank, the UN News Centre reported (10/3/08).

"Any settlement expansion is contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map and to international law," Mr Ban said through a [statement](#) released by his spokesperson.

Addressing the parties in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he re-emphasised the importance of fulfilling obligations under the Road Map, the peace framework drawn up by the Middle East diplomatic Quartet consisting of the UN, European Union, United States and Russian Federation.

### **WEST BANK EXPANSION 'NOT HELPFUL'**

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice held talks with her Israeli counterpart amid fresh diplomatic moves to advance the Mid-East peace process, the BBC reported (10/3/08).

Ms Rice's meeting with Tzipi Livni came after Israel approved a plan to expand a West Bank settlement, which the US called "not helpful". Ms Livni's visit to Washington follows a lull in fighting between Israel and Palestinians in Hamas-run Gaza. US Vice-President Dick Cheney is also due to visit the region next week.

### **AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT 'FAILS TO TAKE A BALANCED APPROACH'**

Greens Senator Kerry Nettle has questioned the stance that the Labor Government appeared to be taking in relation to Israel and Palestine (12/3/08).

"The Greens are concerned that today's motion and speech given by the Prime Minister in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the declaration of independence of the State of Israel insensitively ignored the plight of the Palestinian people," she said.

"The Greens note with concern that the new Labor government has not unequivocally condemned the attacks on the Palestinian territories by the Israeli military or the siege of Gaza, in the same way as they have condemned the attacks on Israel by Palestinians.

"The Greens are also concerned that in today's motion The prime minister failed to recognise the tragic depopulation and destruction of more than 500 Palestinian villages by the Israeli military in the war of 1948.

"A more balanced approach is needed to the conflict in Israel/Palestine if Australia is to be an effective agent for a just peace in the Middle East," she said.

DETAILS: Jon Edwards on O0428 213 146.

## **AFRICA**

### **LIBERIA BEGINS TO RECOVER FROM CIVIL WAR'S NIGHTMARE**

Four difficult years have passed since Liberia's bloody 13-year civil war ended, but finally some real signs of progress can be seen. Big problems still exist, such as a shattered infrastructure and high unemployment, but now there is more electricity available, crime has fallen, and people in general seem more optimistic. [The Washington Post](#) (12/3/08).

### **SOMALIA: CONCERN OVER WORSENING SITUATION**

The humanitarian situation in Somalia had continued to deteriorate alarmingly, the International Red Cross Committee reported (12/3/08).

The protracted armed conflict had been intensified by waves of heavy fighting, not only in the capital city of Mogadishu but also elsewhere in the country, it said. Hundreds of thousands of people had been displaced; their situation exacerbated by a chronic lack of rainfall. The cost of living has risen so steeply that many people could not afford to buy food and other essential items.

ICRC assessment teams reported that in several regions large numbers of displaced families were surviving on something less than one meal a day and spent increasing proportions of their meagre income to buy drinking water. Shortages of food and water had become life-threatening in the regions of at least Mudug, Galgadud, Nugaal and Bakool.

"We visited places where the displaced population had little food and scarcely any possessions," said Daniel Gagnon, an ICRC relief specialist in Somalia. "People told us that the shelling in Mogadishu was so intense that they had fled leaving even the most necessary personal items behind." Two months ago, 3,500 families arrived in Guriel, 300 km from Mogadishu. "The living conditions are shocking," Mr Gagnon said. "In some places, food, water, essential household items, and sanitation facilities are scarce or non-existent."

The high number of weapon-related injuries in Mogadishu also remained a source of great concern to the ICRC. Every day, surgical teams in the two main hospitals, Medina and Keysaney, treat dozens of people wounded by shrapnel and bullets. The ICRC continues to provide extensive assistance to these hospitals.

Since the beginning of 2008, the hospitals had treated over 600 wounded, among them 350 women and children. In 2007, these two hospitals treated more than 4,000 wounded.  
DETAILS: Sydney Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific - Pauline Wall, Communications Officer, on 61 (0)2 9388 9039/mobile 61(0)2 418 485 120.

#### **D. HUMAN RIGHTS & MEANS**

##### **INQUIRY INTO HANEEF CASE ANNOUNCED**

The Federal Government has launched a judicial inquiry into the handling of the case against former terrorism suspect Mohammed Haneef, an Indian doctor working on the Gold Coast, the ABC reported on Thursday.

Dr Haneef was charged with supporting a terrorist organisation involved in bomb plots in the UK last year. The case against him collapsed and all charges were withdrawn, but former immigration minister Kevin Andrews cancelled his visa. It was subsequently reinstated by the new Immigration Minister Chris Evans after the election.

The review is to be carried out by former New South Wales Supreme Court Justice John Clarke QC. Mr Andrews and Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty will be invited to appear.

##### **UN RAPPORTEUR SEMINAR IN SYDNEY**

The UN Special Rapporteur on Terrorism and Human Rights, Professor Martin Scheinin, will lead a seminar on 'Human Rights after 9/11: Challenges and Opportunities' in Sydney on March 28.

Professor Martin Scheinin is professor of Constitutional and International Law and director of the Institute for Human Rights, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland. A leading academic expert in human rights, he has served as a member of the UN Human Rights Committee, and currently serves as the Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism. He is also chairman of the International Law Association's Committee on International Human Rights Law and Practice.

The seminar, at 6pm on March 28 at Baker & McKenzie, Level 27, AMP Centre, 50 Bridge Street, Sydney, is under the auspices of the Australian Human Rights Centre (UNSW), the International Law Association (Australian Branch), and the International Humanitarian Law Advisory Committee of Red Cross in NSW.

DETAILS: Professor Andrew Byrnes, Professor of International Law, UNSW, and Co-Director of Studies, International Law Association (Australian Branch) and [ahrc@unsw.edu.au](mailto:ahrc@unsw.edu.au).

##### **MONKS 'TORTURED AND KILLED'**

Burmese monk Pannya Vamsa, co-founder of the International Burmese Monks Organisation, has called on Australia to support sanctions, co-ordinate with other governments for a unified response and use its influence on China - Burma's most important backer and arms supplier - to improve civil rights and allow democratic progress, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (10/3/08).

Pannya Vamsa, 79, in Australia on a speaking tour, has had a working relationship with the regime in the past ... Now he is campaigning to overthrow the military government. The International Burmese Monks Association was formed in October after the arrest and detention of thousands of monks by the army in the wake of the peaceful uprising.

"In Burma, the present situation, the monks say, 'We cannot do anything. The military government is torturing and killing, and we cannot live peacefully. Help us tell the world leaders, political and religious, what is happening,'" Pannya Vamsa said.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/09/1204998283716.html>

### **MEETING WITH AUNG SAN SUU KYI**

The Secretary-General's Special Adviser on [Myanmar](#) has concluded his latest mission to spur democratic change in the South-East Asian nation, meeting for the second time during his visit with detained pro-democracy leader and Nobel laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (10/3/08).

Daw Suu Kyi, the general secretary of the National League for Democracy and Opposition leader, has been under house arrest for over four years, and has spent more than 11 years in detention since the NLD and its allies won the 1990 election with over 80 per cent of the parliamentary seats.

This was the special adviser's third trip to Myanmar since the government's crackdown on peaceful protesters last summer.

### **BURMA SAYS NO TO UN PROPOSAL**

Burma's military government has rejected a UN proposal to send independent observers to May's referendum on a new constitution (8/3/08). State television said monitors would impinge on Burma's sovereignty. The proposal was made by visiting UN envoy Gambari in a meeting with officials responsible for the referendum. The May referendum has been described as part of a road map for the restoration of democracy.

### **TEXT MESSAGES ASKS MEN TO APPRECIATE AND PROTECT WOMEN**

From Kinshasa to Kivu on Saturday, an electronic text message urged men around the vast Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to appreciate the women in their lives and do more to protect them from abuse the UNHCR reported.

"Acknowledge and celebrate your loved ones. Invest in your mothers, wives, sisters and daughters by ensuring their protection," said the special International Women's Day message, transmitted by the Vodacom text message service under an agreement with the UN refugee agency.

The one-day text message campaign came at a time when the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) targeting women and children – including tens of thousands of internally displaced people – is at an alarming level in the DRC, especially in the violence-plagued eastern provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu.

In DRC, a wide range of abuses against female IDPs are regularly reported, including beatings, abduction, sexual slavery, mutilation and rape, which often exposes the victims to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

### **TIBETANS DEFY INDIAN, CHINESE OFFICIALS TO STAGE PROTESTS**

Around 100 exiled Tibetans defied Indian authorities on Tuesday to continue a 900-mile, six-month march from Dharamsala in northern India to Lhasa in Tibet, to protest Chinese rule ahead of the Beijing Olympic Games. Inside Tibet, Chinese security forces reportedly used tear gas to disperse protesters on Tuesday on the second straight day of demonstrations in the Tibetan capital. [Google/Associated Press](#) (12/3/08). [The New York Times](#) (12/3/08).

### **IRAN'S FORMER PRESIDENT LASHES OUT AT CLERICS**

Mohammad Khatami, a former president in Iran, criticised clerics in the country on Tuesday for disqualifying over 1,700 candidates from contesting parliamentary elections scheduled for coming Friday. Khatami said the moves fly in the face of Iranian peoples' desires for freedom and choice. [ClipSyndicate](#) (11/3/08), [The Denver Post/Associated Press](#) (12/3/08).

### **DETAINEE COMPLAINTS LOOKED INTO BY HREOC**

Following inquiry into complaints, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission this week tabled HREOCA Reports 38 and 39 in Parliament, now online:

No. 39 - Report of Complaint by Mr Huong Nguyen and Mr Austin Okoye Against the Commonwealth of Australia and GSL (Australia) Pty Ltd (2008)

No. 38 - Report of a Complaint by Mr Frank Ottaviano against the South Australia Police (2008)  
DETAILS: <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/>

## **E. HEALTH & MEANS**

### **HEALTH SUMMIT PLANS TO CLOSE GAP FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

More than 100 representatives from peak Indigenous and mainstream health bodies, non-government organisations and the reconciliation movement will partner with the Federal Government to convene the National Indigenous Health Equality Summit, from March 18-20 in Canberra.

Led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, the summit has been developed by the 'Close the Gap' campaign, which involves more than 40 organisations pushing for government commitments to fixing the tragedy of Indigenous health. The event is co-funded by organisations and the government.

"This coalition of organisations has been working for the last two years to put - and keep - the crisis in Indigenous health at the forefront of public and policy attention," Mr Calma said (12/3/08). "We are pleased that the government has acknowledged the seriousness of this challenge and committed to closing the gap in life expectancy within a generation. It is now time to develop the comprehensive plan of action and the partnerships necessary to achieve this."

The first days of the summit would build on the existing commitments of governments around the country to develop targets and benchmarks for achieving health equality, Mr Calma said. "Experts across the Indigenous and mainstream health sector and related fields, will be involved in discussions to provide a roadmap that identifies the tools needed to close the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation.

"The summit will identify timelines and targets for establishing equality of opportunity for Indigenous people to primary health care and health infrastructure within 10 years."

The summit will culminate in a public event at the Great Hall of Parliament House on March 20 when the Minister for Health and Ageing, other government and opposition members, as well as Olympians Catherine Freeman and Ian Thorpe will attend.

"This is a challenge Australia can meet. But only with determined action and partnership with Indigenous people. It is time to 'Close the Gap'," Mr Calma said.

The Coalition of over 40 national bodies include the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation; the Australian Indigenous Doctor's Association; the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses, as well as Oxfam Australia; the National Heart Foundation Australia, the Fred Hollows Foundation, and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR). DETAILS: [BrettHarrison@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:BrettHarrison@humanrights.gov.au) .

### **URGENT ACTION NEEDED TO RESOLVE HEALTH WORKER CRISIS**

The first Global Forum on Human Resources for Health has called for immediate action to resolve the critical shortage of health workers around the world (7/3/08). The forum endorsed the Kampala Declaration and Agenda for Global Action, which sets out the essential steps that need to be taken over the next decade to turn the crisis around. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that the world needs over four million additional health workers, and 57 countries are suffering from an acute shortage. Sub-Saharan Africa is particularly affected by this crisis, with one million health workers needed for this region alone.

DETAILS: [Global forum calls for immediate action/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2008/pr06/en/index.html)  
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2008/pr06/en/index.html>

#### **RECORD-KEEPING A GREAT PROBLEM**

The March issue of the *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation* focuses on the importance of health information. The current issue includes a story on the difficulties of ensuring continuity of record keeping in times of conflict and a discussion on the merits of shifting the ownership of health information to countries from global institutions.

[Current issue of WHO Bulletin/](http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/3/en/index.html) <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/3/en/index.html>

#### **US RESEARCHERS IDENTIFY CANCER GENE**

Geneticists have identified a super gene which causes breast cancer to metastasise, the deadly process by which the disease spreads to other organs, reports the British journal *Nature/Sydney Morning Herald*. Described by US researchers as a "master regulator", the SATB1 gene alters the behaviour of at least 1000 other genes within tumour cells:

REPORTS: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/12/1205126014167.html> and  
<http://www.nature.com/news/2008/080312/full/news.2008.667.html>

### **F. OTHER NEWS**

#### **AGONISING WAIT FOR WOMEN**

For hundreds of thousands of women one of the worst consequences of armed conflict is the long and agonising wait for news about their missing relatives. Since the vast majority of those who are killed or disappear are men, the burden of trying to find out what happened to them usually falls to the women in the family. On International Women's Day the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has focussed on its commitment to ease the plight of women with missing relatives.

The Sydney Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific cites cases such as Ashwak. She is an Iraqi refugee, now living in Jordan, who has lost track of her husband. She and others have searched all the prisons and related institutions for more than four months but have found no trace of him.

"On International Women's Day this year we want to draw attention to the particular plight of women whose male relatives have gone missing", says Florence Tercier, who heads the ICRC's program to help women in war. "Everything possible must be done to prevent disappearances and to provide the women left behind with the support they need.

"In many countries, the mothers, wives, grandmothers, sisters and daughters of the disappeared continue to exert pressure on the authorities long after a conflict has ended. For example, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina organised demonstrations for many years to demand answers from the government about the fate of their missing children."

DETAILS: Sydney Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific  
Pauline Wall, Communications Officer, on 61 (0)2 9388 9039/ (61 2) 418 485 120;  
ICRC website [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org); email: [sydney.syd@icrc.org](mailto:sydney.syd@icrc.org);  
Anna Schaaf, ICRC Geneva on +41 22 730 2271 or +41 79 217 3217

#### **DR RAMOS-HORTA SAYS THANK YOU IN THREE LANGUAGES**

Dr Ramos-Horta recorded a message in three languages to thank everyone involved in his recovery, the ABC reported on Wednesday. He thanked the Australian Government, the prime minister, the people of Australia, world leaders and those who had offered sympathy, support and their prayers, "I thank you all and God bless you," he said.

He remains in a Darwin hospital, recuperating from gunshot wounds after an assassination attempt. While he looked pale, it was reported he appeared confident and determined to show he was well on the way to recovery.

### **PNG'S NEW VISION FOR THE PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP**

The Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Dr Puka Temu, was scheduled to talk about his government's vision for the future of the vital Pacific Partnership between PNG and Australia at a forum at Parliament House, Canberra, on Thursday (13/3/08).

Organised by the ANU's Crawford School of Economics and Government, the event follows Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's recent trip to PNG.

Dr Temu's address, 'Making a Real Difference in the Pacific through Strategic Partnership and New Thinking,' focussed on turning struggling PNG rural communities into prosperous economic centres by improving service delivery and ensuring fair wealth distribution. His government's strategy involves new approaches to the areas of land reform, mining and agriculture.

Both Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Lands and Physical Planning and Mining, Dr Temu is a driver of the National Land Program on major land reforms in PNG as well as chairman of the National Planning Committee and the Ministerial Gas Committee, where many major government decisions are made.

Director of the Crawford School of Economics and Government, Professor Andrew MacIntyre, said earlier that Dr Temu's visit could not have come at a more important time in relationships between Australia and its near neighbour.

"The Deputy Prime Minister's visit is particularly important at a time of renewal in the Australia / Papua New Guinea relationship," he said. "Following Kevin Rudd's visit to PNG last week and Michael Somare's reception, Puka Temu's visit now moves the process of renewal another step forward. Puka Temu is a leader with a big future in PNG."

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

### **DEMOCRACY WOUNDED BY FRIENDLY FIRE**

The Iraq war has inflicted serious collateral damage on the cause of democracy promotion, but Australia is forging a distinctive approach to strengthening democracy in its immediate neighbourhood, Professor Benjamin Reilly was set to tell a conference of politicians and government officials on Friday.

Organised by the ANU's Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) and the Australian Institute of International Affairs, he was scheduled to address a forum, 'Australia's Role in Democracy Promotion.' Professor Reilly, CDI director, says Australia has fashioned a distinct approach to democracy promotion, but it's one that has been made harder by the Iraq "debacle".

"International promotion of democracy has been a staple of Western foreign policy for the past decade, but the Iraq debacle has seriously tarnished this grand project," he says. "The US faith in the willingness of oppressed masses to rise up, welcome their liberators and spontaneously democratise, and then elect pro-Western governments has been exposed as naïve. It raises a challenge that will bedevil all players in this field in the immediate future, including Australia".

Professor Reilly said that the Australian approach, which is based on essentially pragmatic ideals and focused on the Southwest Pacific, is increasingly diverging from the ideological approaches of both the US and its allies.

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

### **FORMER IRANIAN PRESIDENT WILL BE KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

President of Iran from 1997 to 2005, Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, will be the keynote speaker at Melbourne University's Globalisation for the common good: an interfaith perspective, 'From the Middle East to Asia Pacific: Arc of Conflict or Dialogue of Cultures and Religions?' being held from June 30 to July 4 at Trinity College. DETAILS: [www.gcgmelbourne2008.info](http://www.gcgmelbourne2008.info)

According to the Iran Chamber Society, Seyed Mohammad Khatami, the fifth president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, finished his early school years in his homeland. He attended Qom Theology School and obtained a BA in philosophy from Isfahan University. In 1970 he entered the University of Tehran and graduated with an MA, he returned to Qom later to follow up his philosophical studies at Qom Seminary. He was involved in an anti-Shah campaign and began his political activities at the Association of Muslim Students of Isfahan University, working closely with Ayatollah Khomeini's late son, Hojjatoleislam Ahmad Khomeini, and Martyr Mohammad Montazeri. After the revolution in 1979 he replaced Ayatollah Dr Beheshti as head of Hamburg Islamic Centre, Germany. He married in 1974 and has two daughters and a son.

### **CHAUDHRY TAX AFFAIRS PUT UNDER SCRUTINY**

A three-member tribunal was named at the weekend by Fiji's interim Attorney-General to investigate allegations of tax evasion by the Finance Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry. The move comes amid calls for Mr Chaudhry, a former prime minister, to step down, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (11/3/08).

The *Fiji Sun* reported that the tribunal will be headed by the Queensland corporate lawyer Bruce Cowley, Sydney tax agent Russell Postle and former politician Taufu Vakatale. The *Fiji Sun's* publisher, Russell Hunter, was abruptly deported last month because of his paper's coverage of the allegations. REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/10/1205125819951.html>

### **TAIWAN ELECTION OUTCOME LIKELY TO WEAKEN INDEPENDENCE DRIVE**

Both candidates in Taiwan's upcoming March 22 presidential election are advocating closer ties to Beijing. They are publicly endorsing cooperation with China, not nationalism, and a scaling down of the island's independence bid. [The New York Times](#) (12/3/08).

### **COMMITTEE TO LOOK AT DEFENCE PROCUREMENT PROJECTS**

Federal Member for Newcastle Sharon Grierson has been elected chairperson of the Federal Parliament's powerful Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA).

The JCPAA acts as parliament's financial watchdog, and has a unique role in helping to ensure the efficient and effective expenditure of Commonwealth funds.

"As a statutory committee governed by its own legislation, the JCPAA is able to independently inquire into the spending and performance of Commonwealth departments and agencies," Ms Grierson said. "In this way, the JCPAA plays a key role in upholding public accountability and integrity." The committee's schedule would include the Defence Department's largest 30 procurement projects and the bi-annual public hearings with the Taxation Commissioner would be continued. DETAILS: Committee Secretary: on 02 6277 4615.

### **E.T. NOT LIKELY TO RING THE UN**

Extraterrestrials will probably never 'phone' Earth in a way we'd understand as they're unlikely to have evolved human-like intelligence – but that doesn't mean we should give up the search for life beyond our planet, an ANU astronomer argued this week.

In an address at The Australian National University, planetary astronomer Dr Charley Lineweaver reviewed the major patterns of the evolution of life on Earth to make the case that as no other organism on the planet has evolved intelligence closely matching that of humans, it is highly improbable that an extraterrestrial life form would think like we do or have developed technologies similar to ours.

"If human-like intelligence were so useful, we should see many independent examples of it in biology, and we could cite many creatures who had evolved on independent continents to inhabit the 'intelligence niche,' he says. "But we can't. Human-like intelligence seems to be what its name implies – species specific," says Dr Lineweaver, who works at the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics at ANU.

## G. MEDIA MATTERS

### **AFGHANI WOMEN'S MAGAZINE EDITOR ARRESTED IN IRAN**

The editor of a women's rights magazine in Afghanistan was arrested in Iran on March 4 and continues to be held without charge, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) reported (11/3/08).

Ali Muhaqiq Nasab, editor of the monthly *Haqq-e-Zan* (Women's Rights) magazine, was reported by the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA) to have been detained by Iranian officials in Qumm, near the Iranian capital of Tehran. Documents, phones and a computer were allegedly confiscated from his home and Mr Nasab's wife was denied access to see him. Officials from Iran's embassy in Kabul would not answer AIJA's questions.

The arrest of Mr Nasab, a prominent supporter of women's rights, follows the death sentence imposed by an Afghanistan court on Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh in January on charges related to accessing materials about women's rights under Islamic rule. Mr Kambakhsh, 23, a journalist for the daily *Janan-e-Naw*, was charged with blasphemy and accused of distributing articles and books that contained anti-Islamic sentiment. He is appealing his sentence and an international campaign is calling for it to be overturned.

Mr Nasab also was accused of blasphemy in Afghanistan in October 2005, and sentenced to two years' jail after he reprinted articles by an Iranian scholar criticising the stoning of Muslims who converted to another religion and the use of corporal punishment for people accused of adultery. His sentence was reduced on appeal to six months.  
DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

### **CHINA: WARNINGS TO REMAIN SILENT**

Human rights lawyer and university lecturer Teng Biao was released on March 8 after being detained without notice and questioned by Beijing Public Security Bureau officials for 41 hours, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) reported (11/3/08). He was questioned about articles he had written and the content of interviews with journalists. Mr Teng said he could not speak further because officials had warned him not to.

The IFJ also reported that the secretary of the former Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, Bao Tong, had organised two interviews with foreign journalists before the opening of the National People's Congress (NPC) in early March. He was contacted by authorities and advised to refuse interviews to foreign journalists while the NPC and CPPCC were being held. Bao told the authorities he had abided by new regulations introduced by the Central authorities before the 2008 Olympic Games. It was reported that due to coercion by the authorities, he was able to participate in only one of the interviews.

CHINA BULLETIN: IFJ Asia-Pacific at [www.ifj-asia.org](http://www.ifj-asia.org); contributions: [ifjchina@ifj-asia.org](mailto:ifjchina@ifj-asia.org)

### **PAKISTAN: TWO JOURNALISTS KIDNAPPED**

Two journalists from the *Azadi* daily have been reported kidnapped in Baluchistan, just three weeks after the murder of a senior journalist in Quetta, according to the IFJ.

According to the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), an IFJ affiliate, Hameed Baluch and Khalid Khosa, both journalists at the *Azadi* daily, have been reported missing to police by their families. Mr Khosa was last seen on February 29 at a press conference in the southern

Baluch town of Nasirabad. Mr Baluch was reportedly abducted on March 3 in Taftan, close to Pakistan's border with Iran. No one has claimed responsibility.

The PFUJ reports that in the past five years, at least 12 journalists have been abducted in Pakistan. While most of the victims were freed, they endured intense interrogation and physical and psychological torture. Bordering Afghanistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Baluchistan is one of the most dangerous zones for journalists in Pakistan.

Mr Chishti Mujahid, a senior journalist for *Akbar-e-Jehan*, a leading weekly magazine, was murdered in Quetta, the provincial capital, in a targeted attack on February 9. Five journalists were injured in Khuzdar city when a remote-controlled bomb was detonated near a press conference on February 12 in the lead-up to Pakistan's national elections. According to the PFUJ, journalists working in Baluchistan are frequently caught in crossfire in the conflict between security forces and militant and tribal groups. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

### **SRI LANKA: SEVEN QUESTIONED**

Seven journalists were taken in for questioning by Sri Lanka's Terrorist Investigations Department (TID) between March 6 and 8. The journalists were not permitted to notify their, the IFJ reported (11/3/08).

The Free Media Movement (FMM) reported most of journalists were associated with the news and features website [www.outreachsl.com](http://www.outreachsl.com). They included N. Jasiharan, owner of E-Kwality Printers and website writer, his partner Valarmathi, the editor of [www.outreachsl.com](http://www.outreachsl.com), freelance journalist J.S Tissainayagam, another reporter for the website, K. Wijesingha, and visual editor Udayanan. Website cameraman, Ranga, was also taken in for questioning. The editor of the Tamil language *Sarinihar* magazine, S. Sivakumar, who is also an FMM spokesman, was taken in for questioning by TID officers on March 8 but released later that night after recording a statement. It was reported in local media that some of the journalists were questioned about alleged connections to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and that TID would seek court orders to check the bank accounts of some of those arrested.

The IFJ said while it accepts law enforcement agencies have a right to investigate leads in the public interest and take appropriate action as stipulated by the law, it urged due process must be followed regarding the arrested journalists.

"Journalists, like all citizens, have the right to legal advice while in police custody. Their right to inform family and colleagues as to their location while being questioned must be observed, as must the presumption of innocence," IFJ Asia-Pacific Director Jacqueline Park said. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

### **INDEPENDENT FREE MEDIA POLICY NEEDED**

It was also reported that the IFJ had rejected the Sri Lankan Government's proposed national media policy in favour of a self-generated, self-regulated and independent framework that encompassed journalists from all sides of the nation's conflict (11/3/08).

According to the Free Media Movement (FMM), Media and Information Minister Anura Priyadarshana Yapa refused to divulge details of the government's policy but stressed that it was prepared with the assistance of 22 experts and extensive research. His ministry had published large newspaper advertisements explaining details of the policy and calling for public submissions.

Last September nine Sri Lankan journalists' organisations submitted recommendations to the government for the development of a national media policy and the IFJ has emphasised that the media had the potential to contribute to an increasing regard for human rights and to de-escalate conflict within the region.

Leading media organisations in Sri Lanka including the FMM and the Sri Lankan Working Journalists' Association (SLWJA) were critical of the government's national policy, saying there was a need for members of the government, local authorities and the public to respect journalists and an independent media culture and to support the protection of media rights.

"The media is not a state-controlled body. It is a self-regulatory sector. If a government is trying to introduce policies for the media, it shows how primitive it is. What is necessary today from the government's side is to establish a solid legal framework for a free media culture and a healthy background for the media to conduct their duty in a free and fair manner," said FMM Convenor Sunanda Deshapriya.

Minister Yapa, who is also Cabinet spokesman, refused to discuss violence and intimidation targeting journalists and staff at the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) which is reportedly linked to the SLRC's coverage of a melee in which Labour Minister Mervyn Silva allegedly assaulted the news director in December. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

## H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

### **THE NEW FACE OF HUNGER by Ban Ki-moon**

The price of food is soaring. The threat of hunger and malnutrition is growing. Millions of the world's most vulnerable people are at risk (12/3/08). An effective and urgent response is needed. The first of the Millennium Development Goals, set by world leaders at the [U.N.](#) summit in 2000, aims to reduce the proportion of hungry people by half by 2015. This was already a major challenge, not least in [Africa](#), where many nations have fallen behind. But we are also facing a perfect storm of new challenges. The prices of basic staples -- wheat, corn, rice -- are at record highs, up 50 percent or more in the past six months. Global food stocks are at historic lows. The causes range from rising demand in major economies such as [India](#) and [China](#) to climate - and weather-related events such as hurricanes, floods and droughts that have devastated harvests in many parts of the world. High oil prices have increased the cost of transporting food and purchasing fertiliser. Some experts say the rise of bio-fuels has reduced the amount of food available for humans. The effects are widely seen ....

ARTICLE: [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/11/AR2008031102462.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter/) / <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/11/AR2008031102462.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter/>

### **A LEGACY OF TORTURE**

Writing about President Bush's veto to shut down a Congressional effort to limit the Central Intelligence Agency's latitude to subject terrorism suspects to harsh interrogation techniques, Dan Froomkin in the Washington Post (10/3/08) say, "The legacy that Bush affirmed with Saturday's veto was one of torture. By refusing to impose on the CIA the same anti-torture prohibitions mandated by the Army Field Manual - prohibitions against such tactics as water-boarding, prolonged exposure to freezing temperatures, forced nudity, sexual humiliation, mock executions, the use of attack dogs, the application of electric shocks and the withholding of food, water and medical care - Bush cast his lot with the world's torturers and against the global human rights movement that was until recently the centerpiece of American foreign policy.

ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/blog/2008/03/10/BL2008031001388.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

### **UN PUTS SKIDS UNDER BIPARTISANSHIP**

The always fragile and in a sense phony consensus on Indigenous policy is about to be blown apart with the news that shadow attorney-general George Brandis will take to the shadow cabinet a recommendation that the Coalition oppose Labor's commitment to ratify the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Glen Milne writes in The Australian (10/3/08) that Mr Brandis's position will strip the debate on Indigenous affairs of its almost saccharine bipartisanship and that, as a barrister and senior counsel, the Brandis concerns are fundamentally legally based.

ARTICLE: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23346288-7583,00.html>

### **DESPERATE DEEDS BY UNDERDOGS HUNG OUT TO DRY BY CORRUPT BUREAUCRACY**

Xia Tao, who kidnapped ten Australian travel agents this week, was no big player or involved in any political campaign - just one of the despairing individuals being pushed to the wall in the relentless competition for survival in a China that is now less socialist in practice than most Western countries, Hamish McDonald writes in the Sydney Morning Herald ( 8/3/08). His protest, for which he was shot dead, was over traffic fines. One of 100,000 incidents of social protest every year, the incident would not have been widely reported had foreigners not been involved. Grievances are manifold, but the flawed legal system offers little redress.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/07/1204780065661.html?page=2>

### **DEAFENING SILENCE SPEAKS FOR ITSELF**

It is astonishing to see how the US and its allies have defended the right of Israel to self-defence, but remained virtually silent over Israel's killing of many innocent Palestinians in the past week alone and its strategy of encamping the 1.5 million population of the tiny squalid Gaza in order to punish the Palestinian Islamic movement, Hamas, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (7/3/08). It is even more disconcerting how they have said little against the Israeli Deputy Defence Minister, Matan Vilnai, threatening the people of Gaza with shoah, meaning catastrophe or holocaust. A majority of the Israeli and Palestinian people wanted peace. The problem is that the Bush Administration, the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority do not have the will and capacity to deliver what most Israelis and Palestinians and, for that matter, the world desire.

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/06/1204779961217.html>