

# UNITY

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

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

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542

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### A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES

ROBERT HILL: UN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT IN GLOBALISED WORLD  
UN ENVOY DISPATCHED FOR CYPRUS TALKS

### B. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENT

GARNAUT: AUSTRALIA SHOULD HAVE EMISSION TRADING SCHEME 'UP BY  
WORLD'S GLACIERS MELTING AT RECORD RATE: UN

### C. PEACE & SECURITY

'CONSIDERABLE' PROGRESS AGAINST TERRORISM  
IRAQ FIVE YEARS LATER

### D. HUMAN RIGHTS

DALAI LAMA ASKS WORLD LEADERS TO PRESS CHINA  
UN TEAM ARRIVES IN EAST TIMOR

### E. HEALTH & MEANS

STATEMENT OF INTENT FOR INDIGENOUS HEALTH SIGNED

### G. MEDIA MATTERS

### H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

## A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES

### **ROBERT HILL: UN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT IN GLOBALISED WORLD**

Former Liberal minister Robert Hill has taken a veiled swipe at the Howard government's cool relations with the United Nations, the Canberra Times reported (20/3/08).

Mr Hill, a long-serving Howard government minister who became Australia's UN ambassador in early 2006, said last night the UN was increasingly important in a globalised world but it had been kept at arms length by the previous government.

"We haven't always engaged as much as many other countries in the world. Perhaps we haven't always seen it as necessary in our foreign policy," he said, delivering the UN lecture at the Australian National University. "My view is, that in a globalised world, it will become ever more important because I think that multilateral solutions will become ever more necessary.

"Look at climate change. You cannot solve climate change unless you've got a global solution, you've got to have machinery to bring the global community together. More and more of these issues are global issues now therefore you'll see Australia more and more engaged."

ARTICLE: <http://canberra.yourguide.com.au/news/local/general/howard-wrong-on-un-hill/1206883.html>

### **UN ENVOY DISPATCHED FOR CYPRUS TALKS**

Talking of Cyprus, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said this week "I think the international community should seize the momentum, and window of opportunity, when Mr [Dimitris] Christofias, the new Cyprus President was elected, and is committed to resolution of this issue. I met Mr [Mehmet Ali] Talat during my stay in Dakar, Senegal, and he also expressed his willingness to engage in constructive dialogue. In that regard, I have decided to dispatch Under-Secretary-General [for Political Affairs] Lynn Pascoe as leader of an assessment team, to engage in dialogue with all the stakeholders there. We hope that we will be able to see improvements and make some breakthrough in this long pending issue in Europe."

### **SECURITY COUNCIL SHAPES NEW PACKAGE FOR IRAN**

The UN Security Council is preparing to offer Iran a new set of economic, technological and security benefits in exchange for Tehran ending its uranium enrichment plan. The proposal is being shaped by the five permanent Council members and Germany and includes economic, technological and security benefits, spare parts for Iran's aging fleet of Boeing aircraft and help developing a civilian nuclear energy program, [The Washington Times](#) reported (18/3/08).

### **BLUE HELMETS IN LEBANON FOR 30 YEARS**

Blue helmets representing the 25 different national contingents that make up the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon ([UNIFIL](#)) marked three decades of peacekeeping in the Middle Eastern nation on Wednesday (19/3/08).

First created by the Security Council in 1978 to confirm an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the force was enhanced in August 2006 to monitor the cessation of hostilities that erupted that summer between the two neighbours.

It also has the task of supporting the Lebanese armed forces throughout south Lebanon, and extending assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons.

Addressing a ceremony at UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura, Force Commander Major-General Claudio Graziano noted that UNIFIL had gone through various phases since its inception 30 years ago.

"But UNIFIL's goal towards maintaining peace and stability in south Lebanon has never faltered and has always maintained its momentum towards bringing normalcy in the area despite the many challenges," he said.

He dedicated the day to the memory of the 270 UNIFIL peacekeepers who lost their lives in the line of duty since 1978 – 12 of them during the past year.

### **2008 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SURVEY OF ASIA AND PACIFIC**

The launch of the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2008, *Sustaining Growth and Sharing Prosperity*, will be held at 11am at the UN Information Centre for Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific, Level 1, 7 National Circuit, Barton, Canberra on March 27.

The survey will be presented by Professor Raghbendra Jha, executive director of the Australia South Asia Research Centre, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, ANU. It examines the Asia-Pacific region's key short-and medium-term prospects and challenges in macro-economic and selected social areas, especially to further minimise human suffering.

The challenges for the region include:

that despite having enjoyed the fastest growth in a decade during 2007 - chronic neglect of the agricultural sector in Asia and the Pacific is condemning 218 million people to continuing extreme poverty and widening the gap between the regions's rich and poor;

The region's robust economic growth will continue in 2008 – despite economic uncertainties in the US and the continued appreciation of regional currencies.

Other key challenges include climate change, public debt and international migration.

DETAILS: on 02 6273 8200 or [unic@un.org.au](mailto:unic@un.org.au).

### **SPREADING WORD ABOUT WORK UN DOES**

Carmel Mulvany, who heads the UN Works Program - which spreads awareness of the world body's work and encourages people to join the battle for a better world - says the Internet is a key tool for engaging people. "People are hungry to get involved," says Ms Mulvany, who hatched the idea for the department seven years ago. "You can inspire people to take action when you move them and give them opportunities." [The Age \(Melbourne, Australia\)](#) (18/3/08).

### **NEW UN PEACEKEEPING SUPPORT CHIEF APPOINTED**

Susana Malcorra, a top South American businesswoman and previously the World Food Program's deputy executive director for operations and management, has been appointed to lead a new UN department to provide field support for peacekeeping operations. American Johnston Barkat was also named new ombudsman. [Seattle Post-Intelligencer/Associated Press](#) (14/3/08).

### **WORLD BANK OFFICIAL SPOTTED POTENTIAL**

Dilip Ratha, a World Bank official whose research into global remittances - the money that migrants send home - caught the eye of international financial planners, returned recently to the Indian village of his childhood to help push for more efficient development, the New York Times reported (17/3/08). He has championed lower banking transfer fees and more targeted development use of remittances, spurring government projects affecting the lives of millions.

REPORT: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/17/world/asia/17remit.html?ref=world>

### **UN USES SATELLITE PHONES TO RESTORE COMMUNICATION**

The leading UN agency for information and communication technology (ICT) is deploying satellite phones and terminals to help restore vital communication links in Zambia, where some 400,000 people have been affected by severe flooding, UN News centre reported (17/3/08).

The International Telecommunication Union ([ITU](#)) is providing both Thuraya hand-held satellite phones, which provide accurate positioning coordinates to aid relief efforts, as well as Inmarsat

Global Area Network (GAN) terminals.

The mobile terminals, used mainly for voice communications but also high-speed data, are easy to transport to affected areas to facilitate coordination of relief efforts by the government and aid agencies. All transport and usage expenses are covered by the agency.

DETAILS: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=25998&Cr=zambia&Cr1=>

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

### **AUSTRALIA SHOULD HAVE EMISSION TRADING SCHEME 'UP BY 2010'**

Australia should establish an emissions trading scheme to tackle climate change before a comprehensive global agreement on carbon trading was reached, The Australian reported (20/3/08).

Releasing a discussion paper on emissions trading on Thursday, Professor Ross Garnaut advised that Australia should established an emissions budget and specific reduction targets prior to the emergence of a comprehensive global agreement, but comparable in adjustment effort to those accepted by other developed countries.

The discussion paper was issued (20/3/08) as an overview of the early directions and findings of the ongoing Garnaut Climate Change Review as a basis for community discussion. The review was commissioned by Australian state and territory governments in April 2007.

He said the Australian scheme should be running by 2010, in line with the Federal Government's schedule. Electricity and petrol prices would rise under an emissions trading scheme, necessitating government welfare payments to low-income families hit by the extra costs, he said.

Australia should make firm commitments in 2008, to 2020 and 2050 emissions targets that embody similar adjustment cost to that accepted by other developed countries. The report said a lead had been provided by the European Union 'and there are reasonable prospects that the United States will become part of the main international framework after the November 2008 elections. Some version of the current state and federal targets of 60 per cent reduction by 2050, with appropriate interim targets, would meet these requirements.'

Recent developments in the science and the work of the review on current and prospective emissions scenarios suggest 'that ambitions for mitigation will need to rise way beyond those embodied in the Bali roadmap if high probabilities of damaging climate change are to be avoided, the report says.

'Australia should be ready to make firm commitments to specified additional tightening of its own targets for emissions reduction if the international community agrees to effective global action of defined ambition, incorporating appropriately ambitious binding commitments from major developing countries.

'Australia should, during the course of the Bali roadmap discussions, put on the table an offer embodying the cuts in emissions that it would be prepared to make should the major including developing emitting countries agree on a comprehensive set of commitments that together would reduce risks of dangerous climate change to acceptable levels.'

The largest source of increased climate change urgency had stemmed from the unexpectedly high growth of the world economy in the early 21st century, combined with unexpectedly high energy intensity of that growth and continuing reliance on high-emissions fossil fuels as sources of energy, the report states. This included developments associated with strong economic growth in the developing world, first of all in China.

The report continues that Australia's interest lies in the world adopting a strong and effective position on climate change mitigation. This interest is driven by two realities of Australia's position relative to other developed countries: our exceptional sensitivity to climate change: and our exceptional opportunity to do well in a world of effective global mitigation.

'Australia playing its full part in international efforts on climate change can have a positive effect on global outcomes. The direct effects of Australia's emissions reduction efforts are of secondary importance,' his report says.

'Australia can contribute to the development of clear international understandings on the four components of a successful framework for global mitigation.' These are listed as:

setting the right global objectives for reduction of the risk of dangerous climate change;  
converting this into a goal for stabilisation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at a specified level;  
calculating the amount of additional emissions that can be emitted into the atmosphere over a specified number of years if stabilisation of atmospheric concentrations is to be achieved at the desired level;  
and developing principles for allocating a limited global emissions budget among countries.

The review is examining the impacts of climate change on the Australian economy, and is to recommend medium to long-term policies and policy frameworks to improve the prospects for sustainable prosperity. A draft report is to be released by June 30 with a final report by September 30 2008.

REPORTS: <http://www.garnautreview.org.au/CA25734E0016A131/pages/reports-and-papers>

#### **FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DELIVERS EMISSION TRADING TIMETABLE**

A detailed timetable for introducing emissions trading was announced by Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, on Monday. The timetable includes several important stages, including:

- March to June 2008: preliminary consultations on technical issues with industry and non-government groups;
- July 2008: public release of a Green Paper on emissions trading design, drawing on preliminary consultations;
- December 2008: public release of exposure draft legislation;
- March - Mid 2009: Bill considered by Parliament;
- 2009: Consultation on emissions trading regulations;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2009: Act enters into force, regulator established;
- 2010: Emissions trading scheme will commence.

"The introduction of emissions trading will constitute the most significant economic and structural reform undertaken in Australia since the trade liberalisation of the 1980s," Senator Wong said. "Emissions trading places a limit on the amount of emissions we will allow to be produced. This reform will not be simple, but it is the responsible course for Australia to take in reducing greenhouse emissions."

The timetable includes four phases of consultation on key design and implementation issues. "Consultation is a key part of our methodical approach," she said. "An important step will be the release of a Green Paper in early July 2008, to encourage the community and industry to continue offering their ideas on the design and implementation of the scheme.

"I want to assure industry that the views they have already expressed will be taken into account when formulating our policy positions. We are also consulting the states and territories through a

working group of the Council of Australian Governments.” Consultation had begun with the convening of two roundtables involving peak industry and other NGOs in early March.  
DETAILS: <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/mr20080317.pdf>

#### **IMPROVING WATER INDUSTRY SKILLS**

The Federal Government will invest \$1.725 million in two new projects to improve skills in Australia’s water industry, Senator Penny Wong, announced (17/3/08).

Senator Wong said the new \$1.5 million Graduate Course in Water Planning, to be provided by several universities, would boost the number of qualified professionals to tackle water challenges. A \$250,000 National Water Sector Skills Project will develop a national picture of the skills shortages in government, the irrigation sector and urban and rural providers.

#### **LACK OF ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE: DEMOCRATS**

Although top Australian climate scientists were saying strong and early action on greenhouse emissions was crucial and judging the Federal Government’s lack of action on climate change, the prime minister could not be aware that climate change was accelerating rapidly and it may be too late to halt the catastrophic consequences,” Australian Democrats leader Senator Allison said (20/3/08).

“NASA now says CO2 equivalent concentrations of near 450 ppm now probably need to be reduced to 350 ppm to avoid widespread lengthy droughts, wild storms, acidification of the ocean, collapse of the marine food chain, and sea level rises flooding all low-lying agricultural regions and forcing an exodus of hundreds of millions of people,” she said.

“The government’s timetable for increasing the renewable energy target, setting up emissions trading and fostering energy efficiency is just too slow and there is still no sign that it will put a greenhouse trigger into federal environment laws, as promised during the election.”

Yesterday legislation had been passed establishing Infrastructure Australia - a body that will make recommendations to government on large scale transport infrastructure – but reducing greenhouse emissions was not one of its objectives in determining priorities, despite transport sector emissions tipped to increase by 45 per cent by 2020.

"The Rudd Government is good on the rhetoric but it balks at every opportunity to put its talk into action. He should meet with the scientists instead of the fossil fuel industry," she said. Senator Allison has put 12 detailed questions on notice about the latest evidence.  
DETAILS: David Collyer 0417 613 610

#### **CALL FOR GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS TO BE CONSISTENT WITH CLIMATE POLICIES**

Australian governments invest nearly 50 times as much in fossil fuels and uranium mining as they do in renewable energy, an Australian Conservation Foundation report states (18/3/08).

The report, *Responsible Public Investment in Australia*, finds many of Australia’s large government-run funds are making investment decisions that directly conflict with their government’s ambitions to reduce emissions and tackle climate change.

“With so much emphasis on climate change from federal, state and territory governments, many people would be shocked to discover government-controlled funds are still investing \$47 in fossil fuels and uranium for every dollar they invest in renewable energy,” said ACF executive director Don Henry. “Through their investment decisions these big pools of government capital have a significant impact on the health of our environment and society.

“Rather than invest this public money in companies building new coal fired power stations and mining uranium, it should be invested in companies developing renewable energy and finding innovative ways to use energy efficiently,” he said.

“Government-controlled funds that do not manage environmental risks in their portfolios put at risk their financial returns and the world we will leave for our kids.”

The study of 36 federal, state and territory investment funds, with combined control of assets worth \$206 billion, found government-controlled funds were, on the whole, behind industry ‘best practice’, with the majority not considering environment, social and governance risks in their investment decision making processes.

Mr Henry said some government funds appeared to be heading in the right direction.

“The ACT Government has conducted a whole-of-government review of responsible investment practices, but the biggest federal fund of them all, the Future Fund, worth \$59.6 billion, does not appear to have made any commitment to consider environmental, social and good governance principles in its investment decision-making.

“I urge all governments to review their investment funds’ guidelines and make sure they are investing prudently in socially and environmentally responsible companies,” he said.

DETAILS: [http://www.acfonline.org.au/articles/news.asp?news\\_id=1679](http://www.acfonline.org.au/articles/news.asp?news_id=1679)

**WHO ON EARTH CARES** is a new campaign from the [Australian Conservation Foundation](http://www.australianconservationfoundation.org.au) to bring together Australians from all walks of life who share a concern about climate change.

DETAILS: [www.whoonearthcares.com](http://www.whoonearthcares.com); on 08 8232 2566/0408 821 058; [d.noonan@acfonline.org.au](mailto:d.noonan@acfonline.org.au); [www.acfonline.org.au](http://www.acfonline.org.au)

#### **MICRO-ORGANISMS COULD FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE**

Special bacteria that can decompose most materials may be used to turn trash into ethanol, boosting the fight against climate change, scientists hope. Some US investors are now betting on this emerging technology and so should the society at large, the Los Angeles Times argues. REPORT: <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-ed-hope15mar15,0,1737236>. (15/3/08).

#### **WORLD'S GLACIERS MELTING AT RECORD RATE – UN**

With global glaciers – a vital water source for millions, or even billions, of people worldwide – melting at a record rate, the United Nations Environment Program ([UNEP](http://www.unep.org)) has urged countries to agree on a new emissions reduction pact.

According to the UNEP-backed World Glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS), data from nearly 30 reference glaciers in nine mountain ranges indicate that between the years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, the average rate of melting and thinning more than doubled.

The centre, based at Switzerland's University of Zurich, has been tracking glaciers for more than one century, and has noted that while between 1980-1999 average ice loss had been 0.3 metres per year compared to 0.5 metres after the start of the new millennium.

“The latest figures are part of what appears to be an accelerating trend with no apparent end in sight,” said Wilfried Haeberli, WGMS Director. On average, one metre water equivalent corresponds to 1.1m in ice thickness, which suggests a further shrinking in 2006 of 1.5 actual metres and since 1980 a total reduction in thickness of ice of just over 11.5m or nearly 38 feet.

“There are many canaries emerging in the climate change coal mine,” said Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director. “The glaciers are perhaps among those making the most noise and it is absolutely essential that everyone sits up and takes notice.”

2009 will be a crucial year, with the “litmus test” coming in Copenhagen, Denmark, where the negotiations process for a successor pact to the Kyoto Protocol is scheduled to conclude, he said.

“Here governments must agree on a decisive new emissions reduction and adaptation-focused regime. Otherwise, and like the glaciers, our room for manoeuvre and the opportunity to act may simply melt away.”

The WGMS research found that some of the most dramatic glacier shrinking had occurred in Europe with Norway's Breidalblikkbrea glacier thinning by close to 3.1m during 2006 compared with a thinning of 0.3m in the previous year. However, some glaciers – such as Echaurren Norte in Chile – posted increases.

## C. PEACE & SECURITY

### **CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS MADE AGAINST TERRORISM: UN REPORT**

Considerable progress has been made worldwide in the fight against terrorism, including the endorsement of important treaties and the sharing of information between law enforcement agencies, a senior UN official told the Security Council (19/3/08).

Although [resolution 1373](#) is as relevant today as it was when it was adopted in the wake of the September 2001 attacks against the United States, “most countries in the world have now criminalised terrorism,” Mike Smith, executive director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), told the Council in an [open debate](#).

Since the adoption of the landmark resolution, Mr Smith said that there have been hundreds of new ratifications of the key counter-terrorism pacts.

“There has been an almost unprecedented level of international exchange of information and cooperation among relevant agencies across borders, with the purpose of disrupting planned terrorist attacks and enabling the arrest and prosecution of those engaged in terrorism,” he said.

Thus, the focus had shifted now to ensuring that nations have the capacity and expertise to implement the measures of resolution 1373, which calls for countries to enhance their ability to counter terrorist activities nationally, regionally and globally.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26043&Cr=terror&Cr1=>

### **BAN DEPLORES KOSOVO ATTACK ON UN MISSION**

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon deplored attacks against personnel of the United Nations mission in Kosovo as they re-established control over a courthouse in Mitrovica that a mob had forcibly occupied last week (17/3/08).

In a [statement](#) issued by his spokesperson, Mr Ban urged calm, called for dialogue and reaffirmed that UNMIK would continue action required by the Security Council [resolution 1244](#), which set up the UN administration after Western forces drove out Yugoslav forces amid inter-ethnic fighting in 1999. Last month, the Assembly of Kosovo's Provisional Institutions of Self-Government declared independence from Serbia.

### **UN POLICE BACK IN KOSOVO**

UN police have begun to return to the Serb part of the divided Kosovo town of Mitrovica after clashes on Monday when a UN officer was killed, the BBC reported (19/3/08). Regular protests have shaken the town since Kosovo declared independence last month.

Separately, Croatia and Hungary have joined the growing list of nations to recognise Kosovo's independence. A similar statement was expected from Bulgaria, another Balkan nation.

ARTICLE: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7305752.stm>

### **IRAQ FIVE YEARS LATER**

Five years after the US-led invasion, Iraq faces a major humanitarian crisis, with law and order and economic recovery a distant prospect, international aid and human rights groups report. The International Committee of the Red Cross has highlighted the plight of millions of Iraqis who still have little or no access to clean water, sanitation or health care (See Health & Means).

In a separate report, Amnesty International stated the rights situation in Iraq was "disastrous", AFP reports (18/3/08). "Five years after the US-led invasion that toppled (former president) Saddam Hussein, Iraq is one of the most dangerous countries in the world," the 24-page report said. Against a backdrop of insecurity, law and order and economic recovery were a "distant prospect" while most Iraqis were living in poverty, with food shortages, lack of access to safe drinking water and high unemployment.

"Saddam Hussein's administration was a byword for human rights abuse," said Amnesty's director for Middle East and North Africa, Malcolm Smart. "But its replacement has brought no respite at all for its people."

REPORT: [http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gklm7UOdsJdlg6Y1\\_qu-sCQ2f66A](http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gklm7UOdsJdlg6Y1_qu-sCQ2f66A)

### **BUSH TALKS 'VICTORY' IN IRAQ**

Overthrowing Saddam Hussein was "the right decision", US President George W Bush said to mark the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, the BBC reported (19/3/08). He said the world was a safer place because the US had acted and dismissed what he called "exaggerated estimates" of the war's price tag.

"The costs are necessary when we consider the cost of a strategic victory for our enemies in Iraq," he said. He said recent troop reinforcements had brought about "a major strategic victory in the broader war on terror". ARTICLE: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7305023.stm>

### **UN HOSTS NEW WESTERN SAHARA PEACE TALKS**

New peace talks for Western Sahara hosted by the United Nations began Sunday between Morocco and Polisario Front, the independence-seeking rebel movement based in Algeria. The UN brokered a cease fire between the two sides in 1991, but since then a planned referendum on the future of the territory has failed to take place amid continued disagreements. [BBC](#) (16/3/08).

### **NORTH KOREAN TALKS LOOK PROMISING**

US envoy Christopher Hill has expressed optimism that the impasse in negotiations over North Korea's nuclear program that surfaced in December is on its way to being resolved. He met in Geneva last week with North Korean envoy Kim Kye Gwan, not reaching a fresh nuclear disclosure deal but seemingly making progress. [The Christian Science Monitor](#) (17/3/08).

### **ANTI-NUCLEAR PUSH TO POLITICIANS**

MAPW (Medical Association for the Prevention of War) has a new introductory leaflet on the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and a new DVD to be sent to every Federal Labor politician, explaining why the new Federal Government is central to the future of nuclear weapons abolition. DETAILS: [Jessica@icanw.org](mailto:Jessica@icanw.org); [www.mapw.org.au](http://www.mapw.org.au)

## **D. HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **TIBET**

#### **DALAI LAMA ASKS WORLD LEADERS TO PRESS CHINA TO DIALOGUE**

Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, has called on world leaders to press China to resume a dialogue on Tibet following the wave of violence there, the BBC reported (19/3/08). Earlier UK PM

Gordon Brown said China's Premier Wen Jiabao had told him he was open to talks under certain conditions. China was continuing to move large numbers of troops into Tibet. Reports have emerged of protests in Chinese provinces bordering Tibet, including Tibetans tearing down a Chinese flag in Gansu province. The Dalai Lama had earlier asked Tibetan activists not to undertake a controversial march from India to Lhasa, fearing additional violence.

In a letter from his base in exile in Dharamsala, northern India, the Dalai Lama said he was committed to a peaceful solution and sought "the international community's support for our efforts to resolve Tibet's problems through dialogue".

"I urge them to call upon the Chinese leadership to exercise the utmost restraint in dealing with the current disturbed situation and to treat those who are being arrested properly and fairly."  
ARTICLE: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7305445.stm>

Earlier in the week the Dalai Lama said he was willing to step down as head of the Tibetan government in exile, if that was needed to stop the riots in his homeland. He said he could not also stand down as spiritual leader.

China repeated its charge that he had masterminded the violence, the ABC reported (19/3/08). Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao has defended the security crackdown on Lhasa, capital of the predominantly Buddhist mountain region, and on neighbouring Chinese provinces where rioting by Tibetans erupted over the weekend.

"There is ample fact and plenty of evidence proving this incident was organised, premeditated, masterminded and incited by the Dalai clique," Mr Wen said in Beijing. "This has all the more revealed the consistent claims by the Dalai clique that they pursue not independence but peaceful dialogue are nothing but lies." The Dalai Lama, who fled Tibet in 1959 after a failed uprising against Chinese rule, denied the charges.

#### **UN SECRETARY-GENERAL: INCREASING CONCERN**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he was "increasingly concerned" about recent developments in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, including reports of violence and loss of life, and urged restraint by the authorities there, the UN News Centre reported (17/3/08).

Mr Ban said he discussed the matter with the Chinese Ambassador Wang Guangya at their meeting that morning. "I expressed by concern and my views to the Chinese Government."

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour earlier issued a statement calling on the Chinese authorities to allow protestors to exercise their right to freedom of expression and assembly.

#### **DEMOCRATS URGE PM TO GIVE CHINA CLEAR MESSAGE**

PM Rudd was soon to visit China and "he must convey a clear message that a continued policy of intolerance towards peaceful protest in Tibet would have consequences for the China-Australia relationship," Australian Democrats Senator Allison said.

As a fluent Mandarin-speaker, Mr Rudd was uniquely placed among world leaders to put these concerns before the Chinese Government.

"The brutal crackdown by Chinese authorities on protests in Tibet must be strongly deplored by the Australian Government. The Chinese Government's response to these recent protests in Tibet, their oppression of Uyghurs in neighbouring Xinjiang, their support for the genocidal regime in Sudan, and the arrest of prominent human rights activists like Hu Jia shows there is still a very long way to go," she said.

“When China was awarded the Olympic Games, it promised its human rights record would improve. The rest of the world must hold China to account, lest the Olympic Games be seen as tacit support for Chinese policies.” DETAILS: David Collyer 0417 613 610

## AFRICA

### **UN REPORT SAYS 1200 KILLED IN KENYA**

While the violence that swept across Kenya several months ago was triggered by disputed presidential polls, the crisis was fuelled by underlying causes including poverty and discrimination, UN human rights officials said, urging greater accountability and an end to impunity to address those issues and prevent further outbreaks (19/3/08).

A report released by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) states that more than 1,200 Kenyans were reported killed during the violence that engulfed the East African nation since the December 2007 elections in which President Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner over opposition leader Raila Odinga.

Thousands more were injured, over 300,000 people displaced and around 42,000 houses and many businesses were looted or destroyed, according to the 20-page [report](#), prepared by a fact-finding team that visited Kenya from February 6/28.

Among the underlying causes that fuelled the violence are pre-existing violations of economic and social rights “as evidenced in the lack of access to water, food, health, decent housing together with the rate of youth unemployment and the gross inequality reported by civil society organisations,” states the report.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26038&Cr=kenya&Cr1=>

## SOUTH EAST ASIA

### **UN TEAM ARRIVES IN EAST TIMOR**

A team of experts from UN Headquarters in New York has arrived in Timor-Leste to assess key areas where the world body has been supporting the young nation, including the development of its police force (19/3/08).

Led by UN Police Advisor Andrew Hughes, the team includes officials from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the UN Development Fund ([UNIFEM](#)), the International Centre for Transitional Justice, the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) and the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL).

They will consult with a wide range of stakeholders during the 11-day visit, including political leaders, government officials and key members of civil society.

In addition to examining the progress made by the PNTL, the team will also consider how best to support the overall reform of the national police and the wider security sector.

At a meeting last month with the leadership of the former ruling party Fretilin, the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Timor-Leste, Atul Khare, stressed that security sector reform is a priority area and its success will be critical for the nation, which the UN helped shepherd to independence in 2002.

The fledgling nation has faced a number of security-related challenges during its short period of independence, including violent clashes that erupted in 2006 and, last month's attacks on the Timorese president and prime minister.

### **HIGH RATE OF 'VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN EAST TIMOR'**

East Timor has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence in South-East Asia, yet a lack of information and knowledge of the law and formal legal processes, contributes to an extremely low prosecution rate, the Australia East Timor Friendship Association reports.

Sexual violence against women during the Indonesian occupation by soldiers and police was widespread and neither the police nor the legal system took these crimes seriously, it reports. Very few cases were ever investigated or tried and consequently there was little community understanding and trust of the formal justice system. Even after independence the rate of violence against women in East Timor remains high. Endemic poverty, unemployment, post-traumatic stress disorder and a highly patriarchal culture are factors in such violence.

Julia Davey, an Adelaide-based lawyer who has ongoing involvement with Timor Leste, will address a public meeting on 'Violence against Women in post-independence Timor Leste' and social, legal and political implications, on April 6 at 2pm at FILEF Meeting Room, rear 15 Lowe Street, Adelaide.

She has worked for the Judicial System Monitoring Program in Dili, the Victim Support Service, established in April 2005 in Timor Leste, to provide legal support to women and children victims of gender-based violence, including both domestic and sexual violence. She also works on Timor Leste media laws. She lives in Adelaide with her Timorese partner and their one-year-old son and regularly returns to Timor Leste.

### **UN PRESIDENT URGES STRONG COMMITMENT OVER MYANMAR**

Meeting with the top United Nations envoy for Myanmar, General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim called for "serious engagement and strong commitment" from all parties to further national reconciliation (17/3/08).

Mr Kerim voiced confidence in the role and work of Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari, who recently completed a visit to Myanmar and who is mandated by the assembly to "promote national reconciliation, democracy and human rights."

Mr Kerim said he was encouraged by the fact that the special envoy was able to meet with key figures, including pro-democracy leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as with the Referendum Convening Commission and the Constitution Drafting Committee.

The president appealed for "serious engagement and strong commitment from all parties to continue the process of national reconciliation that needs to be credible and inclusive." Last month, the Myanmar authorities announced it would hold a constitutional referendum in May, to be followed by "multi-party democratic elections" in 2010. Mr Kerim said he hoped the Myanmar Government would be open to allowing the UN a monitoring role.

## **MIDDLE EAST**

### **UN CALL FOR IRAQI HUMAN RIGHTS TO BE FACED SWIFTLY**

The [United Nations](#) on Saturday called on the Iraqi Government and the United States to take advantage of a period of reduced attacks to address the human rights problems that plague [Iraq](#), including violence against civilians, abuse of detainees, persecution of women and ethnic minorities, and a lack of food and shelter for displaced people.

In a new human rights report, the UN noted some progress, including "a marked decrease in violent attacks involving mass casualties" from July to December, the period covered in the report. It applauded the Iraqi Government's decision to ratify the UN convention against torture and the government's efforts to alleviate overcrowding in prisons, and it took note of new judicial safeguards for detainees.

But “even with improvements, this is not enough,” said Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Representative to Iraq. Among the concerns in the report were an increase in the number of juveniles held in detention, the so-called honor killings of women in the northern region of Kurdistan, the killing of civilians by private security contractors — among them, the shooting of 17 Iraqis by employees of [Blackwater](#) in Nisour Square in September — and “continuing reports of the widespread and routine torture or ill treatment of detainees, particularly those being held in pre-trial detention facilities.”

### **CONCERN OVER TURKISH ‘ANTI-SECULAR ACTIVITIES’**

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has criticised a proposal to ban his ruling AK Party as being against the “national will”, the BBC reported (16/3/08). He was speaking after Turkey's chief prosecutor asked the country's Constitutional Court to ban the party, accusing it of anti-secular activities.

Turkey's secularist constitution does not allow any religious influence on the operation of the state. The AK Party, which has Islamist roots, won last year's general elections, the BBC reported. Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya said he believed there was enough evidence to show the party had contravened Turkey's secular constitution. The party has been under investigation for six months.

Turkey is currently implementing reforms as part of its bid to join the EU. The AKP is already locked in a battle with Turkey's secular elite, backed by the powerful military, over recent changes to a ban on wearing headscarves. REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7298291.stm>

## **AUSTRALIA**

### **HANEEF ‘INQUIRY NEEDS REAL POWERS’**

Perhaps there's a police force somewhere in the world happy to hang its dirty washing in public just because it's asked. Perhaps. But not in Australia, David Marr writes in the Sydney Morning Herald (19/3/08).

“As John Clarke, QC, tries to get to the bottom of the Dr Mohamed Haneef mess, he has no power to compel the Federal Police Commissioner, Mick Keelty, or his officers to say anything, produce any document, face cross-examination, or even turn up to account for themselves. The rules of contempt don't apply. Perjury may go unpunished. Whistleblowers are unprotected. Frankly, the police have more power to investigate crimes than Clarke has to investigate the police. And the former judge has no leverage over ASIO.”

ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/18/1205602381764.html>

### **STATE YOUR VIEW ON UN DECLARATION ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ RIGHTS**

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on September 13 2007. It was adopted with 143 countries voting in favour, 11 abstaining and four voting against. Australia was one of the four countries who voted against the declaration.

With the change of government at the last Federal election there has been a change in position on the declaration with the Rudd Government indicating that it supports the Declaration.

The government has now sought the views of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, among other stakeholders, on matters relating to how they ought to formally indicate support for the declaration at the United Nations.

“In the course of providing advice, the government has asked that I seek the input of Indigenous organisations. I acknowledge that there is an extremely limited time period provided for this comment. Accordingly, I am seeking your views on the following matters relating to the declaration, as well as other issues that you consider should be addressed at this time,” Commissioner Tom Calma writes (18/3/08).

"Please provide contact information to enable us verify the source of the comments / information and so we can follow up with any clarifications or further information." Contact information is requested so the commission can verify the source of comments/information and, if necessary, follow up with any clarifications or further information. Click to have your say: [http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social\\_justice/declaration/comments.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/declaration/comments.html).

### **NATIONAL COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN BILL PUT TO FEDERAL PARLIAMENT**

Queensland Senator Andrew Bartlett has introduced a Bill into Federal Parliament to establish an independent national commissioner for children.

"With no political voice of their own, the rights of children are often ignored or marginalised," Senator Bartlett said (18/3/08). "A children's commissioner would ensure that the needs, views and rights of people under the age of 18 are recognised and promoted.

"Along with promoting the rights of children, the commission would monitor and review laws, policies and practices which impact on service provision for children.

"There has been a groundswell of community support for such an initiative over many years now with community groups, child abuse advocates and many politicians advocating a greater need for child protection and the recognition of children's rights."

He said Australia was seriously lagging behind other western countries in child protection. Britain has had an independent Commissioner for Children for three years, and most Australian states had also established a similar position. DETAILS: Tracee McPate on 0417 607 655.

### **SEX DISCRIMINATION COMMISSIONER'S 'LISTENING TOUR' IN WA**

Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick is continuing her national 'Listening Tour' in the Northern Territory and Queensland. She will be in NT over March 24/28 and Queensland from April 14/18.

"I want to hear from as many sections of Australian society as possible so I will be meeting with business, community and employee groups whose input will inform the next five years of my term as commissioner," Ms Broderick said.

"I want to know people's ideas for how we can best achieve real economic independence for women, and how we can support women and men to better balance their work and family lives." She also wants to hear views about necessary steps to create a society free from discrimination, harassment and violence. DETAILS: [www.humanrights.gov.au/listeningtour/](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/listeningtour/)

### **WHISTLEBLOWER FACES APPEAL AGAINST COMPENSATION**

RailCorp had spent almost \$300,000 in a three-year legal battle against an employee who blew the whistle on corruption and fraud, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (15/3/08). Now it was appealing against the \$16,000 in compensation she was awarded by the courts for unfair dismissal. ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/14/1205472088526.html>

## **E. HEALTH & MEANS**

### **STATEMENT OF INTENT FOR INDIGENOUS HEALTH SIGNED**

A Statement of Intent between the Australian Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples represented a milestone in the long road towards achieving equality in health status and life expectancy for Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma said (20/2/08).

"This partnership between the Australian Government, Indigenous and non-Indigenous health experts and the reconciliation movement, means we are well on the road to making health equality a reality for Indigenous Australians by 2030," he said.

The government and Indigenous health leaders signed the Statement of Intent on Thursday in the Great Hall of Parliament House to work together to achieve equality in health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians by the year 2030.

"Since 2005, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) has been working with peak Indigenous health bodies and the non-government sector to achieve commitment from the governments of Australia to achieving equality of health status and life expectation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people within 25 years.

"This statement today means that benchmarks and targets for achieving these fundamental human rights for Indigenous Australians are not only possible but are now firm commitments." Mr Calma said the \$19 million over three years announced by the government to tackle high rates of smoking in Indigenous communities, and \$14.5 million over four years to fund a national Indigenous Workforce Training plan was a concrete example of the Statement of Intent in action. This was in addition to the \$261 million in Indigenous health initiatives already promised.

The Statement of Intent signing was the culmination of the first ever two-day Indigenous Health Equality Summit held in Canberra from March 18-20.

Statement of Intent: [http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social\\_justice/health/statement\\_intent.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/health/statement_intent.html)  
DETAILS: Louise McDermott 0419 258 597

#### **MILLIONS IN IRAQ 'WITHOUT CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION'**

Millions of Iraqis have little or no access to clean water, sanitation and healthcare, five years after the US-led invasion, according to the Red Cross, the BBC reported (17/3/08). The Swiss-based agency says Iraq's humanitarian situation is "among the most critical in the world".

It warned that despite better security in some areas, millions had been left essentially to fend for themselves. Some families spent a third of their average monthly wage of \$150 (£75) just buying clean water, the report found.

An even worse humanitarian crisis in Iraq will only be averted if much more attention is paid to the everyday needs of Iraqi citizens, the report by the International Committee of the Red Cross said. Healthcare in Iraq was "now in worse shape than ever" and the services available were too expensive for many people.

Iraqi hospitals lacked qualified staff and basic drugs, facilities are not properly maintained and public hospitals provide only 30,000 beds, less than half of the 80,000 needed. The agency said the current situation had been exacerbated for the 27m population by decades of previous conflict and economic sanctions.

The report also says that tens of thousands of Iraqis had effectively disappeared since the start of the war.

"Many of those killed in the current violence have never been properly identified, because only a small percentage of the bodies have been turned over to Iraqi government institutions," it said. Violence rates in the country have fallen 60 per cent since last June, although the US military commander there, Gen David Petraeus says the security gains are fragile and could be easily reversed.

Tens of thousands of Iraqis - nearly all men - are in detention, including 20,000 inmates at Camp Bucca near Basra run by US-led multinational forces. Iraq is the Red Cross's largest operation worldwide with an annual budget of \$106m (£52m) and 600 staff.

### **AFTER 5 YEARS OF WAR IN IRAQ**

On March 20 is the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, the Medical Association for the Prevention of War (MAPW) website listed links to resources and publications documenting the effects of the war on health. Two new resources are:

*Iraq – a multi-faceted emergency*, a paper written by MAPW member Dr Rae Chang, currently working in the Middle East: [www.mapw.org.au/download/iraq-multifaceted-emergency](http://www.mapw.org.au/download/iraq-multifaceted-emergency) and *Medact (UK)* report on the health situation in Iraq: [www.medact.org/pub\\_reports.php](http://www.medact.org/pub_reports.php)

In addition, the Iraq body count site which lists documented civilian deaths (estimated deaths are claimed as far higher): [www.mapw.org.au/link/iraq-body-count](http://www.mapw.org.au/link/iraq-body-count)

### **IPPNW DELHI CONGRESS**

Fifteen members of the Medical Association for the Prevention of War (MAPW) attended the 18<sup>th</sup> World Congress of IPPNW ([International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War](http://www.ippnw.org)) in Delhi, with seven students also attending the preceding Student Congress. Australians led discussions on the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). Tilman Ruff and Ruth Mitchell were elected to the IPPNW Board. Papers will be available later on the IPPNW website. See also [www.mapw.org.au](http://www.mapw.org.au).

### **FIGHT AGAINST TB SLOWS**

A new publication by the United Nations health agency finds that the pace of global efforts to control the tuberculosis (TB) epidemic slowed slightly in 2006, as did progress in diagnosing people with the airborne infectious disease that is both preventable and curable. [Global Tuberculosis Control 2008](http://www.who.int), released (17/3/08) by the World Health Organisation (WHO), reports there were 9.2 million new cases of TB in 2006, including 700,000 cases among people living with HIV, and 500,000 cases of multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB). In addition, an estimated 1.5 million people died from TB in 2006, while another 200,000 people with HIV died from HIV-associated TB.

The 12th annual report, which contains data up to 2006 provided by 202 countries and territories, cites several reasons for the slowdown in progress, including that some successful programs at the national level have not been able to maintain their efforts at the same pace in recent years. There has also been no increase in the detection of TB cases through national programs in a number of African countries.

### **WHO: TUBERCULOSIS KILLED 1.7 MILLION PEOPLE IN 2006**

The global fight against tuberculosis is proving difficult, with the deadly disease spreading as cases go undetected in India and China, the World Health Organisation warned on Monday. Tuberculosis killed some 1.7 million people in 2006, and an estimated 9.2 million people were infected that year, WHO says in its annual [report](http://www.who.int) on disease. [Bloomberg](http://www.bloomberg.com) (18/3/08).

### **PLAGUE OF RATS CAUSE FAMINE**

Around one million residents in the Indian state of Mizoram face severe food shortages because of a plague of rats that decimated local rice crops. Rats were drawn to the Mizoram forests by the flowering of wild bamboo fruits, which occurs every 48 years. [AlertNet.org/Reuters](http://www.alertnet.org) (17/3/08).

### **ZIMBABWE SUFFERS SEWERAGE PROBLEMS**

The health threat from overflowing sewage is only the latest problem to hit Zimbabwe, spreading not only bad odour but risk of disease. The failure by municipalities to repair busted sewers is but one serious consequence of the country's collapsed economy. [IRINNews.org](http://www.irinnews.org) (14/3/08).

## G. MEDIA MATTERS

**CHINA:** A defence lawyer, Li Fangping, told the international press this week that a verdict could be announced shortly in the case of human rights activist Hu Jia, who was tried in a Beijing court on March 18.

Mr Hu, 34, was arrested in December and charged on January 29 with "inciting subversion of state power". He was accused of making comments to foreign media and publishing articles on *Boxun*, a banned Chinese-language website based in the US, critical of the Chinese authorities concerning democracy and human rights.

On January 6, more than 100 human rights lawyers, writers and activists wrote an open letter to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress calling for the law on "inciting subversion of state power" to be amended. They said the law not only jeopardised freedom of speech for all citizens but also breached China's constitution.

Human Rights Watch said Mr Hu and co-writer Mr Teng cooperated over an open letter entitled 'The Real China and the Olympics' in September 2007, discussing human rights violations.

Foreign journalists were ordered out of the Tibetan parts of Gansu and Qinghai provinces on March 16 by police who told them it was for their own "safety", the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) reported (17/3/08). Authorities in Tibet had confiscated and deleted some materials, including imagery and computer data.

**PAKISTAN:** As Pakistan prepares for the first parliamentary sitting of the new coalition government, an international IFJ mission, supported by Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), has visited Pakistan.

The time was right for radical and lasting change in the relations between media and the state, IFJ General Secretary Aidan White said, after meetings with senior government and media leaders on March 13. "The challenges facing the new government and media are clear – what is needed now is the political will and professional courage to bring about reform."

The third international IFJ mission to Pakistan since February 2007 follows a year when public access to information and the rights of journalists to report were severely curtailed, particularly as new anti-media laws heralded a media clampdown under emergency rule imposed by President Pervez Musharraf in November 2007.

There has been continuing violence against journalists, IFJ states. On March 13, cameramen and journalists were attacked, chased and beaten while reporting a demonstration by a women's movement outside the Karachi Press Club, according to the PFUJ. A media driver was taken hostage by armed protesters who warned journalists not to broadcast video footage. It was also reported that across the country, journalists continued to contend with verbal and physical abuse and risk unwarranted arrest, abduction and murder.

The mission delegates, including the IFJ General Secretary, Sunanda Deshapriya and Mike Dobbie, are meeting with members of the caretaker government, leaders of the new coalition government, journalists' unions and associations and media publishing houses.

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

### **SRI LANKA: GOVERNMENT ASKED TO INTERVENE**

The IFJ has demanded that the Sri Lankan Government order the police to take immediate action against perpetrators of a series of attacks against staff of the state-owned Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC), as the Free Media Movement (FMM) reported yet another violent attack on an SLRC journalist (14/3/08).

FMM reported that Anurasiri Hettige was beaten with an iron rod by an unidentified gang on March 14. Journalists and staff of SLRC have been targeted with threats and intimidation for an apparent link with media coverage of a December TV station melee alleged to have involved a government minister. Incidents include:

January 25: Lal Hemantha Mawalage attacked by two armed men, suffered severe cuts to his arm; also received death threats on his phone on March 4;  
January 29: Attempted attack on Duleep Dushantha by two armed men at his home; Dushantha's mother threatened with death for informing on the incident;  
February 27: Priyal Ranjith Perera, assistant director of News Camera, attacked by unidentified armed gang at his home; and  
March 5: Ranjani Aluthge, SLRC librarian, stabbed with razor knife on a public bus.

As many as 10 journalists, media workers and journalists' leaders from other television stations and media also have been targeted for their involvement in covering the December 27 incident and the subsequent media staff protests against a government minister, it was claimed. These included: Poddala Jayantha, a senior journalist with *Silumina* and the secretary of the Sri Lankan Working Journalists' Association (SLWJA) faced an attempted abduction by armed assailants at his home on January 7; death threats were made to leading personnel at the MBC TV and Radio network: MTV head Chevaan Daniel, Sirasa director Kingsley Ratnayaka and Sirasa news director Susil Kedelpitya. Kedelpitya reported that his house and whereabouts were being kept under surveillance;

Threats also have been made against media activists including SLWJA president Sanath Balasooriya and Dharmasiri Lankapeli, the general secretary of the Federation of Media Employees Trade Union. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

In separate matters, the home of journalist Munusami Parameshwari was entered by several intruders with clubs in Gampola, in the Kandy district, on March 14 and her father and sister seriously injured, IFJ reported (17/3/08). According to the Free Media Movement (FMM), the attackers warned the family that Ms Parameshwari would risk death if she returned to Gampola. The Gampola police eventually rescued the family.

Ms Parameshwari has been in hiding after recent threats against her life. She had been arrested by the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) while working as a crime reporter for the *Mawbina* Sinhala-language newspaper in November 2006. Articles in newspaper reports alleged she was carrying explosives and linked to terrorist groups, which was later proved to be fabricated, it was reported. The *Mawbina* has since closed after its editor and financial manager were arrested and the company's assets were frozen by government officials.

After Ms Parameshwari was released without charge on March 22, 2007, she was kidnapped by uniformed men who threatened her with death if she continued to report on crimes or conduct investigations into abductions; two people disguised as police officials later took her passport and national identification at gunpoint. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

**AFGHANISTAN:** The IFJ reports that four Afghan journalists are being held in detention, Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh, Ghows Zelmay, Jawed Ahmad and Ali Muhaqiq Nasab (in Iran). It is reported they have been denied legal representation, ability to have visitors and time outdoors.

Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh, 23, a journalism student and reporter for the daily Jahan-e Naw, has been transferred to a prison in Kabul as the appeal on his death sentence continues. Ghows Zelmay, a former journalist and spokesman for the attorney-general, was arrested by police in November on accusations of publishing a Dari translation of the Qur'an, a criminal act under Islamic law. According to the AIJA and CPAJ, the conditions of Mr Zelmay's prison cell are appalling. He is detained in a dark room with dozens of other prisoners and criminals, and has no access to writing materials or books and is not permitted outside.

Ali Muhaqiq Nasab, editor of a women's rights magazine in Afghanistan, was reportedly arrested in Iran on March 4 and continues to be held without charge. Local reports suggest Iran's Government will not allow Nasab to have an independent lawyer to defend him. Instead, he will be offered a lawyer from the special religious court of Iran.

Jawed Ahmad, a journalist working for Canadian Television (CTV), is being held without charge at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. He was detained by US military forces in September. Mr Ahmad, 22, was arrested at Kandahar airport for reportedly having contacts with local Taliban leaders and possessing a video containing Taliban materials.

Agence France-Presse reported that Lt. Col. David Acceta, spokesman for the American Military at Bagram, confirmed that Ahmad was being detained but maintained that he was "not detained because he is a journalist".

## H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

### OBAMA'S ROAD MAP ON RACE

Barack Obama was supposed to be on his heels, forced into a backpedalling, defensive crouch after racially charged remarks by his former pastor, delivered from the pulpit years ago, suddenly became the hottest story of the presidential campaign, Eugene Robinson writes in the Washington Post (19/3/08). "But instead of running away, Obama issued a challenge to those who would exploit the issue of race: Bring it on. Yesterday morning, in what may be remembered as a landmark speech regardless of who becomes the next president, Obama established new parameters for a dialogue on race." ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/18/AR2008031802649.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

### A SPEECH THAT FELL SHORT

Michael Gerson also writes in the Washington Post (19/3/08): Barack Obama has run a campaign based on a simple premise: that words of unity and hope matter to America. Now he has been forced by his charismatic, angry pastor to argue that words of hatred and division don't really matter as much as we thought. Obama's speech ...It was one of the finest political performances under pressure since [John F. Kennedy](#) ...It also fell short in significant ways. ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/03/18/AR2008031802594.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

### BEIJING'S DREAD OF DISSENT

Why has Beijing taken a hard line in Tibet? The key is "stability of state", writes John Lee in The Australian (18/3/08). "Don't be fooled by the glamour of Shanghai or the magnificence of Beijing. There are large swaths of disunity and disorder in the country. For example, China claims 23 provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities, and two special administrative regions: Hong Kong and Macau. Of these, Taiwan remains recalcitrant and is effectively a separate state. Many of the Uighurs in the western province of Xinjiang want out. Residents in Hong Kong want guarantees that Beijing will not dismantle the rights they enjoyed under British rule. And traditional Tibetans, fearful of a complete Han Chinese takeover and the suppression of their culture and religion, want more and more autonomy."

John Lee is a visiting fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies.

ARTICLE: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23391594-7583,00.html>

### BLINKERS OFF FOR THE OTHER SIDE OF STORY

At 11.58am on Wednesday one half of the Australian Parliament "celebrated" the 60th anniversary of the state of Israel. More than a third of that one-half was absent, whatever their reasons ... Labor's Kevin Rudd, as the host, did not. He spoke for eight minutes ... The Liberals' Brendan Nelson spoke for seven minutes in supporting the Prime Minister ... The only other person who spoke - or attempted to - was a middle-aged woman ... "What about UN resolution

242?" Two attendants moved in quickly, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (15/3/08). Sussan Penelope Ley is the daughter of a British colonial police officer who served in British-mandated Palestine in the 1930s before the UN ceded half of it to become a Jewish state in 1948. ARTICLE: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/14/1205472079215.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap2>

### **THE CULT OF THE SUICIDE BOMBER**

Khaled looked at me with a broad smile. He was almost laughing. At one point, when I told him that he should abandon all thoughts of being a suicide bomber – that he could influence more people in this world by becoming a journalist – he put his head back and shot me a grin, world-weary for a man in his teens. "You have your mission," he said. "And I have mine ... And he was ready to immolate himself," Robert Fisk writes in The Independent (14/3/08).

ARTICLE: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/fisk/robert-fisk-the-cult-of-the-suicide-bomber-795649.html>

### **HOW TO NEGOTIATE WITH IRAN**

It may only be a matter of time before the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran sit down for serious negotiations, writes Ambassador John W. Limbert (Ret.). But how can these two implacable foes get to "yes"? Herewith, a brief how-to guide.

Foreign Policy magazine March 2008:[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=4220](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4220)