

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 28 2008

543

Editor: Judy Cannon - 07 3358 2623

Email: judycnnn@yahoo.com.au

Contributing Editor: Ian Mathews - 02 6281 4025

Email: 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 or email the editor.

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

A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES

AGRICULTURAL NEGLECT IN ASIA PUTS MILLIONS IN POVERTY

UN: AFGHANISTAN COULD DO BETTER

B. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENT

EARTH HOUR MARCH 29

AUSTRALIAN CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN BY OCTOBER

C. PEACE & SECURITY

PRAISE FOR PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI LEADERS

BUSH SILENT ON TROOP NUMBERS FOR IRAQ

D. HUMAN RIGHTS

CHINESE INTELLECTUALS BRAVE GOVERNMENT RETRIBUTION

BAN SPEAKS OUT AGAINST MODERN SLAVERY

E. HEALTH & MEANS

WFP FUNDS REEL UNDER RISING FOOD COSTS

MAJOR SUCCESS WITH POLIO BUT UNTREATABLE TB TO SPREAD

G. MEDIA MATTERS

H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES

NEGLECT OF AGRICULTURE IN ASIA LEAVES MILLIONS IN POVERTY: UN

Chronic neglect of agriculture in Asia and the Pacific has left over 200 million people in extreme poverty amid rising prices for foodstuffs and despite robust growth in other sectors, according to a United Nations report released on March 27.

The Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2008, produced by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)), says that 218 million people – a third of the region's poor, largely living in rural areas – could be lifted out of poverty by raising agricultural productivity.

"The report asks the question why poverty still remains so high despite the much applauded high growth rates in the region," Rob Vos, Director of the Development Policy and Analysis Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), said as he helped [launch](#) the study at UN Headquarters in New York.

"The neglect of agricultural development and rural development has been among the main causes," he said.

Launching the report in New Delhi with Indian Government officials, Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of ESCAP, said: "It is simply unacceptable that at a time when the economic growth of Asia and the Pacific has surpassed all expectations, we are not doing all that we can to improve the lives of more than 200 million people living in such poverty."

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26109&Cr=ESCAP&Cr1=>

UN ASKS AFGHANISTAN TO DO BETTER

On March 20 the Security Council [renewed](#) the mandate of the United Nations political mission in Afghanistan and widened its scope to include leading international civilian efforts to provide political outreach, support reconciliation programs and strengthen cooperation with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

In a resolution supported unanimously by the 15 members, the council called on the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) – whose mandate now runs until 23 March 2009 – to do more to implement the Afghanistan Compact, the five-year UN-backed blueprint that sets benchmarks for security, governance and development goals.

The text also calls for additional efforts to improve the rule of law, combat corruption, tackle the drug trade, monitor human rights and encourage economic development.

The resolution was adopted after the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, last week urged the Council to sharpen UNAMA's mandate given the challenges that Afghanistan has faced over the past year, especially a booming drug industry and a more resilient than expected insurgency.

Mr Guéhenno told an open debate that the fledgling democracy's governmental institutions were "fragile and without capacity" and, despite its commitment and generosity, the international community had been "insufficiently united on key issues of policy."

The resolution voices concern about "the increased violent and terrorist activities by the Taliban, Al-Qaida, illegally armed groups, criminals and those involved in the narcotics trade, and the increasingly strong links between terrorism activities and illicit drugs."

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26059&Cr=unama&Cr1=afghan>

MANDATE FOR UN COUNTER TERRORISM DIRECTORATE EXTENDED

On the same day the Security Council unanimously voted to [extend](#) the mandate of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), which is tasked with monitoring the efforts of countries to combat the global scourge of terrorism, until the end of 2010.

Established as a special political mission in 2004, the CTED assists the council's Counter-Terrorism Committee in monitoring the implementation of [resolution 1373](#), which was adopted in the wake of the September 2001 attacks on the US and calls on countries to adopt a number of measures to enhance their ability to counter terrorist activities nationally, regionally and globally.

In the latest resolution, the council reaffirmed that "terrorism in all forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security," and emphasised the "central role" that the UN plays in the fight against the global scourge.

CTED Executive Director Mike Smith told the council that considerable progress had been made worldwide in the fight against terrorism, including the endorsement of important treaties and the sharing of information between law enforcement agencies.

Although resolution 1373 was as relevant now as it was when adopted nearly seven years ago, "most countries in the world have now criminalised terrorism," he said, noting that since the adoption of the landmark resolution, there had been hundreds of new ratifications of the key counter-terrorism pacts.

REPORT: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26055&Cr=terror&Cr1=>

PM LEAVES FOR US, EUROPE AND CHINA

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd left for his 17-day world tour on Thursday when he will visit North America, Europe and Asia, the ABC reported (27/3/08).

He is visiting US President George Bush, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Chinese President Hu Jintao and will also meet with business leaders.

Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith told ABC TV's Lateline program that Mr Rudd would take the chance to urge world leaders to give Japan and India permanent seats at the UN Security Council. REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/03/27/2200170.htm>

PM SEES AUSTRALIA AS MIDDLE DIPLOMATIC POWER

The new Australian Government was committed to the principle of creative middle power diplomacy as the best means of enhancing Australia's national interests, Prime Minister Rudd told the East Asia Forum on Thursday.

It was also the best means of acting as effective international citizens in enhancing the global and regional order. That meant operating in partnership with our long-standing ally the United States, "as the government argues that the US continues to be an overwhelming force for good in the world," he said. The forum was held in conjunction with the Australian National University.

Mr Rudd said Australia needed to act "in partnership with our friends in the Asia Pacific region in organisations including APEC, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit. It also means acting in partnership with the United Nations across the range of pan-global challenges from climate change, the Millennium Development Goals and the continuing challenge of nuclear weapons proliferation. In all these domains, Australia intends to prosecute an active, creative middle power diplomacy in partnership with the community of nations." Australia's voice had been too quiet for too long across the various councils of the world.

Speaking of his current visit, he said security policy, climate change, development assistance, humanitarian intervention and broader human rights would also feature prominently during this visit.

"We are committed to re-vitalising our engagement with the United Nations – and working more closely together in the UN with our partners around the world, including Europe. And we are committed to close engagement with the countries of Asia and the Pacific. It is our neighbourhood. And it is a natural focus for our foreign policy."

SPEECH: http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0145.cfm

BAN: RACISM STILL HURTS TOO MANY

Racism still hurts too many individuals and communities around the world, Secretary-Ban Ki-moon said, calling on all countries and civil society groups to play their part in the fight to stamp out both racism and racial discrimination (21/3/08).

In a message to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, he said next year there would be a formal review of actions taken since the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance adopted its Declaration and Program of Action.

"Racial discrimination is a concern to all peoples and countries," he said. "This review process is an opportunity to engage in an inclusive and transparent manner on an issue that demands our urgent and close attention.

"I call on all countries and civil society to make constructive use of the time between now and the formal review process to work out their differences so that we can seize this opening to boost our collective efforts to stamp out racism. This issue is too important; we cannot fail."

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26061&Cr=Racial&Cr1=Discrimination>

UN RESOLUTION OVER HUMAN RIGHTS IN NORTH KOREA?

A pending resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva that expresses concerns over rights violations in North Korea will get South Korea's backing, a South Korean foreign ministry official said on Wednesday. South Korea usually refrains from voting on UN resolutions on North Korea so as not to escalate tensions between the two neighbours. [Chicago Tribune/Associated Press](#) (free registration) (26/3/08).

WAR CRIMES COURT IN SIERRA LEONE HAS MIXED REVIEWS

The six-year-old war crimes court in Sierra Leone, supported by the UN, so far has convicted 13 people for committing atrocities during the country's devastating civil war, but some victims of war crimes claim the well-funded court was too narrow in scope and they were unlikely to ever get justice. [The Washington Post](#) (26/3/08).

CHANGES IN GLOBALISATION TO FEATURE AT UN CONFERENCE

Containing the global economic slowdown and adapting development thinking to "the second wave of globalisation" will be major topics at the upcoming session of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), it was reported (18/3/08).

Delegates to the April 20/25 meeting will also address the implications of emerging challenges, such as high energy prices, [UNCTAD](#) Secretary-General Supachai Panitchpakdi said.

A central focus of the conference, at Accra, Ghana, will be the special development challenges of Africa, he said. The current, "second wave" of globalisation, Mr Panitchpakdi said, had come about as developing countries become major players in the world economy.

Earlier this month, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed hope that the UNCTAD-XII conference could galvanise support for a more development-friendly global economic, trading and financial system, among other goals.

Established in 1964, UNCTAD promotes the integration of developing countries into the world economy. It also helps shape policy debates on development, with a focus on ensuring that domestic policies and international action are mutually supportive of sustainable growth.

Noting that 2008 was a pivotal year in the effort to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which aim to reduce extreme poverty and other global ills by 2015, Mr Ban said that UNCTAD-XII must promote financial policies that help meet the MDGs in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, as a matter of urgency.

UN 'UNIQUELY PLACED' TO LEAD EFFORTS FOR GLOBAL GOOD: BAN

The UN was "uniquely placed" to lead efforts to tackle climate change, global health, counter-terrorism and disarmament, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon [said](#) (18/3/08), urging participants at a Model UN conference to act as catalysts for change in support of the world body's work.

The organisation is expected to work towards a more prosperous, healthy, secure and just world, Mr. Ban said, acknowledging that this was a "daunting" task. "But the United Nations has proven, at various stages of its history, that it is capable of rising to new challenges."

Calling those present the "leaders of the future," he said that they had the potential to devise inventive new ways to confront the challenges the world faces.

He also hoped that one day, there would be a woman secretary-general, and said that the Model UN conference had set an example by selecting woman at the helm. "Let me add that it gives me great pleasure to utter the words, 'Madame Secretary-General,'" he said.

UN: BARGAIN AT \$2.5 BILLION

In a letter to the Washington Post, Andrew E. Rice (Cabin John), writes (25/3/08) that a March 21 front-page article on UN financing ['Expenses at U.N. Balloon 25 Percent'] stated administrative costs at the United Nations totalled about \$2.5 billion a year (of which the US pays 22 per cent). 'Here, in Montgomery County, our county executive and council are considering a budget of \$4.3 billion for the coming year. It's an interesting contrast, isn't it?' His letter was headlined: The U.N. Bureaucracy? A Bargain at \$2.5 Billion

B. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENT

EARTH HOUR – THE BIG SWITCH-OFF - MARCH 29 AT 8PM

ANU astronomers are urging city dwellers to use Earth Hour to look to the stars, as the great 'switch-off' will help reduce the light pollution that otherwise obstructs views of space in urban areas.

This Saturday people in cities around Australia and the world will turn off their electric lights between 8pm and 9pm to raise awareness about the links between energy use and global warming. But the darker skies will also be a positive development for people interested in outer space.

"Light pollution is a real problem for optical astronomers, as it overpowers the light from distant stars and galaxies," says Professor Brian Schmidt from the Research School of Astronomy and Astrophysics. In some cities the light pollution is so bad that people never see even the brightest stars."

Cities taking part include Copenhagen, Toronto, Chicago, Melbourne, Brisbane and Tel Aviv. They will switch off for Earth Hour, following 2.2 million people and 2100 Sydney businesses that turned off lights for one hour on March 31 2007. It reduced Sydney's energy consumption by 10.2 per cent, the equivalent of taking 48,000 cars off the road for a year.

DETAILS: <http://earthhour.org/user/da3U>; Carly Hall, Urbis on +617 3007 3800;
www.urbis.com.au

COOPERATIVE CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN PROMISED FOR OCTOBER

The projections for Australia of the impacts of climate change were serious: a drying climate in traditional agricultural areas; a greater frequency of floods; droughts and storms and the impacts of higher temperatures on community health, the Prime Minister's website reported after this week's COAG meeting (all Australian governments) in Adelaide.

"The introduction of an emissions trading scheme to achieve emission reductions will constitute the most significant economic and structural reform undertaken in Australia since the trade liberalisation and financial market reforms of the 1980s," it stated.

COAG stressed the urgency of the current work to bring together the different approaches on renewable energy targets to combine into one national scheme in order to provide consistency for investors looking to support Australia's renewable energy industry. In addition, COAG agreed to consider options for a harmonised approach to renewable energy 'feed in tariffs'. COAG agreed to finalise a comprehensive framework for addressing climate change at its October meeting.

WEBSITE: http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2008/media_release_0147.cfm

SEE ALSO ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT RE MURRAY RIVER.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON COASTAL COMMUNITIES

The House of Representatives Climate Change, Water, Environment and the Arts Committee is to conduct an inquiry into climate change and environmental impacts on Australian coastal communities (20/3/08).

Committee chairman Jennie George welcomed the co-referral of this inquiry by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts Peter Garrett and the Minister for Climate Change and Water Senator Penny Wong.

"Much of Australia's population and infrastructure is in the coastal zone, increasing our vulnerability to climate change impacts," Ms George said. "The growth in population and intensification of land use along the coast is further increasing pressure on the environment in many areas."

The terms of reference provide for the committee to inquire into climate change and environmental pressures experienced by Australian coastal areas. The inquiry will have particular regard to:

- existing policies and programs related to coastal zone management, taking in the catchment-coast-ocean continuum;
- the environmental impacts of coastal population growth and mechanisms to promote sustainable use of coastal resources;
- the impact of climate change on coastal areas and strategies to deal with climate change adaptation, particularly in response to projected sea level rise;
- mechanisms to promote sustainable coastal communities, and
- governance and institutional arrangements for the coastal zone.

The committee will accept submissions until May 30. DETAILS: <http://www.aph.gov.au/ccwea>.
BACKGROUND DETAILS: Committee Secretariat on 02 6277 4580; ccwea.reps@aph.gov.au.

BIO-FUEL CROPS PUT FOOD SUPPLIES 'IN PERIL'

Growing use of such crops as wheat and corn to make bio-fuels is putting world food supplies in peril, the head of Nestle, the world's biggest food and beverage company, has warned, The Australian reported (24/3/08).

"If as predicted we look to use bio-fuels to satisfy 20 per cent of the growing demand for oil products, there will be nothing left to eat," the chairman and chief executive, Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, said.

"To grant enormous subsidies for bio-fuel production is morally unacceptable and irresponsible," he told the Swiss newspaper *NZZ am Sonntag*.

While the competition is driving up the price of maize, soya and wheat, land for cultivation was becoming rare and water sources are also under threat, he said.

UN independent expert on the right to food, Jean Ziegler, speaking at the UN General Assembly last year, called for a five-year moratorium on all initiatives to develop bio-fuels in order to avert what he said might be "horrible" food shortages. Diplomats from countries pursuing such fuels, such as Brazil and Colombia, disagreed with his forecast.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23422023-12377,00.html>

CIRCA 1500-YEAR-OLD ICE SHELF READY TO COLLAPSE

Antarctica's Wilkins Ice Shelf, a fixture for perhaps 1,500 years, is on the verge of collapse, scientists say, and the culprit is rising global temperatures. "The ice shelf is hanging by a thread - we'll know in the next few days or weeks what its fate will be," British Antarctic Survey scientist David Vaughan said, [Google/Associated Press](#) (25/3/08), [The Independent \(London\)](#) (25/3/08).

C. PEACE & SECURITY

MIDDLE EAST

BAN PRAISES PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI LEADERS

Palestinian and Israeli leaders were praised for their commitment to the Middle East political process despite the recent spike of violence by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Tuesday and he urged that the targets for a settlement set in last year's talks be kept.

[Opening](#) a Security Council [briefing](#) and debate, Mr Ban recalled that the parties projected reaching an agreement by the end of 2008 when they met in Annapolis, US, in November. "It is my hope that we can achieve this ambitious goal," he said. "I believe all of us must ask ourselves, and the parties, two simple questions: If not this, what? If not now, when?"

He commended Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert for their commitment to the process, despite the death toll in Gaza and Israel this month and ongoing high tensions.

"I am personally and profoundly committed to supporting this process in every way I can, and I admire both for their tenacity in the face of much scepticism," he said.

He urged the international community, particularly members of the Security Council, to ramp up their support for a negotiated settlement, saying it was too important to be allowed to lose momentum.

Briefing the council on events of the past month, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe regretted that continuing efforts to advance the peace process had been again overshadowed by high numbers of civilian casualties and lack of concrete improvements on the ground.

During the reporting period, he said, 124 Palestinians, including 36 children, were killed in operations of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), and 359 were injured, while 13 Israelis, including four children, were killed by Palestinian militants, with 55 injured.

ISRAELIS SAY 'NO OPTION' RULED OUT TO STOP IRANIAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak told visiting US Vice President Dick Cheney that "no option" would be ruled out in Israel's bid to stop Iran developing nuclear weapons. "Israel considers that (economic) sanctions are still the order of the day, but no option should be ruled out," said Mr Barak, according to the Australian (24/3/08).

"Iran's weapons program threatens not only the stability of the region, but of the whole world," he said. Mr Cheney, on the penultimate leg of a nine-day regional trip, met Mr Barak with armed forces chief Gabi Ashkenazi and the head of military intelligence Amos Yadlin.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23422018-12377,00.html>

HAMAS ALLEGES EGYPTIAN TORTURE

The Palestinian militant movement Hamas has accused Egypt of torturing members of a group who were detained after crossing from the Gaza Strip, the BBC reported (21/3/08)

A Hamas spokesman said security forces had demanded to know about Hamas leaders' movements and the location of captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. The questions had nothing to do with the security of Egypt. Hamas says 39 of its members were being held in Egypt, while 90 others had been released in recent weeks. The Egyptian authorities have not commented.

Most entered the country in January when hundreds of thousands of besieged Gazans crossed into Egypt after militants breached its border wall near Rafah.

SADR CALLS ON IRAQIS TO STAGE SIT-INS

Iraqi security forces continued to battle Shiite militants in Basra in a drive to win control of the southern oil city, but violence and unrest had spread to Baghdad and other cities, the ABC reported (26/3/08).

Police and health workers said at least 12 people were killed in the fighting in central and northern Basra where Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army has a strong presence. The commander of Iraqi forces in the operation said only that "many outlaws" had been killed. Sadr, an influential leader who has not been seen in public for months, issued a statement calling on Iraqis to stage sit-ins all over Iraq and said he would declare "civil revolt" if attacks by US and Iraqi forces continued.

The Iraqi Government said the operation aimed to win control of Basra - whose vast oil fields provide most of Iraq's revenues - from militias and criminal gangs who dominate the semi-lawless city of about two million people.

"This operation will not come to an end in Basra without the law prevailing and being respected," government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh said after Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki arrived in Basra to personally oversee the operation.

REPORT: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/03/26/2199079.htm>

BUSH SILENT ON TROOP NUMBERS IN IRAQ

Troop levels in Iraq would remain nearly the same throughout this year as at any time during the five years of war under plans presented to President George Bush by the senior US commander in Iraq and the US ambassador there, the Sydney Morning Report (26/3/08).

The New York Times reported that Mr Bush had announced no final decision on future troop levels after the video briefing by General David Petraeus and the ambassador, Ryan Crocker. On that day Americans learned of the 4000th US military death of the war, days after the invasion's fifth anniversary.

It was reported that it was likely any decision on big withdrawals of US troops would be left to the next president. REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/25/1206207104519.html>

GREEK CYPRIOT AND TURKISH CYPRIOT LEADERS TO TALK

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon congratulated the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders on their agreement to start full-fledged negotiations within three months on resolving the long-running dispute on the Mediterranean island (24/3/08).

"The United Nations stands ready to lend its full support to the Cypriot people in their efforts to reach a settlement," Mr Ban's spokesperson, Michele Montas, [said](#) in New York. A meeting between the Greek Cypriot leader, Mr Demetris Christofias, and the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mr Mehmet Ali Talat, was hosted by the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Michael Møller, last week.

The leaders decided to set up a number of working groups and technical committees in advance of talks and to open a crossing at Ledra Street in Nicosia as soon as technically possible. The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe will go to Cyprus shortly to help the UN determine how it can help the process. The UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) was established in 1964 following inter-community violence.

AFRICA

MUGABE THREATENS BUSINESSES

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe has threatened to force businesses to cut prices ahead of the March 29 elections, the BBC reported (25/3/08). Prices have again shot up after Mr Mugabe awarded huge pay rises to teachers and civil servants last month.

"We are going to read the riot act to them [businesses]," he told a campaign rally in Hwange. The government last year ordered prices to be reduced, leading to widespread shortages. Zimbabwe's annual inflation rate is 100,000 per cent - the world's highest.

The state-owned Herald newspaper reports that Mr Mugabe has ordered business leaders to attend a meeting with government officials. "We want them to reduce prices to those which were in effect before the salary hike," he said. He said that anyone who refused to co-operate would be nationalised, through the new Indigenisation and Empowerment Act, under which businesses are supposed to be majority-owned by black Zimbabweans.

Mr Mugabe says white-owned businesses were raising prices in order to reduce his chances of being re-elected. The businesses say the official prices are below the cost of production.
REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7312649.stm>

LIBERIA MAKES PROGRESS DESPITE CHALLENGES

The Liberian Government continues to make progress as it rebuilds after a devastating civil war, including the start of economic recovery and the restoration of basic services, but significant challenges, such as poverty and high unemployment, remain to be addressed, according to a United Nations [report](#) (25/3/08).

Despite some encouraging developments, "a number of tasks that are critical to the sustainability of peace and stability still have to be fully implemented," UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon writes in his latest report to the Security Council on the activities of the UN Mission in Liberia ([UNMIL](#)).

He cites the need for the reform of the legal and judicial system, the reintegration of war-affected populations and the extension of the rule of law throughout the country. In addition, Liberia still faces significant reconstruction and development challenges, including pervasive poverty, corruption, food insecurity, high unemployment, massive illiteracy and poor infrastructure.

Last August Mr. Ban outlined a drawdown plan for both the military and police component of UNMIL to be carried out in several stages, resulting in 9,750 peacekeeping troops and UN police on the ground in Liberia at the end of 2010. One of the benchmarks for the drawdown is the creation of a 500-person quick reaction force in the country's National Police, set to be established by July 2009.

In the present report, the Secretary-General notes that some progress was made in meeting the indicators of progress identified under the four key benchmarks of security, the rule of law and governance, economic revitalisation, and basic services and infrastructure. At the same time, progress was slow in some areas, particularly in the strengthening of the justice sector and the establishment of an independent national human rights commission.

While significant progress has been made in the restructuring and training of the police, the deployment and operations of the force were still hampered by a lack of vehicles, communications equipment and accommodation. Mr Ban appealed to donors to generously support the equipment and deployment needs of the Liberian National Police.

He also called for the creation of sustainable job opportunities, particularly for the large number of unemployed youth in the country, including former combatants, who continued to pose a potential threat to stability. The government had regained control of diamond mining, but further measures were needed to ensure that the diamond industry was effectively regulated.

AU CONFRONTS COMORAN ISLAND CONFLICT

Comoran troops, supported by African Union soldiers, continued on Wednesday to confront supporters of a rebel who had seized power on one of the small Indian Ocean country's islands. [Google/Agence France-Presse](#) (26/3/08).

AFGHANISTAN

MOTORCYCLE ASSAILANTS KILL DE-MINERS

The top UN envoy to Afghanistan said he was both appalled and saddened by an "abhorrent" attack on a group of de-miners which claimed five lives and injured seven others. Two unknown assailants on a motorcycle opened fire on a 12-person team working for the Afghan Technical Consultants, a partner of the UN Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan ([UNMACA](#)).

"De-miners put their lives at risk every day to ensure the safety of Afghanistan's communities," Bo Asplund, the Secretary-General's Acting Special Representative, stated. "It is abhorrent that anyone would target individuals working to free the people of Afghanistan from the scourge of landmines."

SOUTH EAST ASIA

CLERIC URGES FOLLOWERS TO 'TO BEAT UP TOURISTS'

Islamic cleric Abu Bakar Bashir has called on followers to "beat up" Western tourists and for young Muslims to die as martyrs, the Australian reported (24/3/08).

In a sermon, organised by an Islamic youth organisation and delivered a few kilometres from the home village of convicted Bali bombers Amrozi and Mukhlas, Bashir was reported to have likened tourists in Bali to "worms, snakes, maggots", and specifically referred to the immorality of Australian infidels. The address was caught on video by an Australian university student.

It was claimed he told youths to aspire to a martyrdom death. Bashir was convicted of conspiracy over the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people, including 88 Australians, but was later cleared and released from prison.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23421343-601,00.html>

AFRICA

SUDAN'S ARMY RAPED, PILLAGED IN WEST DARFUR ATTACKS: UN

The UN human rights chief has accused the Sudanese army of looting towns and raping girls and women in West Darfur during an attack with Arab militias, the Sydney Morning Herald/AP reported (21/3/08).

The attacks on Sirba, Sileia and Abu Suruj on February 8 by helicopter gunships and fixed-wing aircraft left at least 115 people dead and caused 30,000 to flee their homes, Louise Arbour, the UN high commissioner for human rights, said in a report.

"The scale of destruction ... suggests that the damage was a deliberate and integral part of a military strategy," the nine-page report said. The UN said its concerns were ignored in discussions with the governor of West Darfur. Other government officials denied collusion between the army and Janjaweed militia.

Most of Abu Suruj and much of Sileia was burnt down when militia on camels and horses joined the Sudanese army in attacking the towns. Some residents were burnt alive inside their homes, including a 75-year-old blind woman and a disabled girl, the report said. The Sudanese military has said it bombed the towns while striking at rebel forces, but Darfur rebels denied any of their fighters were present. Eyewitnesses told UN experts that rapes and other acts of sexual violence were committed during and after the attacks. That had been a continuing theme of the five-year Darfur conflict.

Fighting has raged since ethnic African tribesmen took up arms in 2003, complaining of decades of neglect and discrimination by the Sudanese Arab-dominated government. The UN investigation was conducted by human rights experts belonging to the UN-African Union force attempting to keep order in Darfur.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/21/1205602622333.html>

NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENTS

FRANCE TO REDUCE NUCLEAR WARHEADS

President Nicolas Sarkozy has said France will reduce its number of airborne nuclear weapons by one third, the BBC reported (21/3/08).

Mr Sarkozy said the reduction to fewer than 300 missiles would leave France with "half the maximum number of warheads we had during the Cold War". But he insisted he was committed to France's nuclear deterrent, saying it was its "life-insurance policy".

He was inaugurating a new nuclear-armed submarine, the Terrible. France is believed to have 348 deployed nuclear weapons, including 288 submarine-launched ballistic missiles, 50 air-launched cruise missiles and 10 airborne bombs, according to the Federation of American Scientists.

Mr Sarkozy said military spending needed to be re-examined. The cuts would reduce France's airborne force of nuclear weapons by a third, he said, leaving fewer than 300 warheads, mostly on board submarines.

US PUSHES INDIA ON NUCLEAR ARRANGEMENT

The US, concerned that time is running out on gaining an agreement on the proposed civil nuclear arrangement with India, is pressing India's coalition government to get on board, the

Financial Times reports. The Bush administration wants the agreement partly because it would strengthen ties between the countries, which is important for regional strategic reasons, but many politicians in India have expressed skepticism. [Financial Times \(free registration\)](#) (25/3/08).

D. HUMAN RIGHTS

CHINESE INTELLECTUALS BRAVE GOVERNMENT RETRIBUTION

A group of Chinese writers, dissidents and lawyers has braved the threat of government retribution and the hostility of angry nationalists by calling for talks with the Dalai Lama and an end to the propaganda war over Tibet, the UK Daily Telegraph reported (25/3/08).

The open letter, written by 29 leading intellectuals, said that the unrest showed that China's policy towards Tibet had failed. It added that it was time to allow freedom of speech and religion, to invite the media and the United Nations human rights commission into the region and to hold direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama.

It also singled out the increasingly strident response of both the government and ordinary Chinese, at home and abroad, for criticism.

Separately, Nicolas Sarkozy, the President of France, has refused to rule out a boycott of the Olympic Games opening ceremony.

REPORT: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2008/03/24/wchina124.xml>

OPPOSITION 'MUST BE WIPED OUT'

China yesterday turned its back on appeals for dialogue with the Dalai Lama, vowing to smash anti-China forces in Tibet, where it said the death toll from recent unrest had risen to 19, The Australian reported (24/3/08). It said an editorial in the *People's Daily*, mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, stated opposition to Chinese rule in the Himalayan region had to be wiped out.

"China must resolutely crush the conspiracy of sabotage and smash 'Tibet independence forces'," said an editorial, rejecting calls from US, European and Asian leaders for talks. The commentary accused the Dalai Lama of masterminding protests in Tibet in the hope of undermining the August 8-24 Beijing Olympics and gaining Tibet independence from Beijing.

REPORT: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23421144-2703,00.html>

BAN SPEAKS OUT AGAINST MODERN SLAVERY

As the United Nations honoured the memory of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed the hope that the struggle against "one of the greatest atrocities in history" will inspire the world in the battle against modern forms of slavery such as forced labour and human trafficking (25/3/08).

"Even as we mourn the atrocities committed against the countless victims, we take heart from the courage of slaves who rose up to overcome the system which oppressed them," Mr. Ban said at a special ceremony at UN Headquarters marking the first International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

"These brave individuals, and the abolitionist movements they inspired, should serve as an example to us all as we continue to battle the contemporary forms of slavery that stain our world today," he [told](#) those gathered at the event, which included performances by African drummers, dancers and poets and a steel pan troupe from the Caribbean.

Mr Ban said even today millions around the world, including children, were suffering under the yoke of racism, forced labour, sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

The UN General Assembly in December 2007 adopted a resolution designating March 25 as an annual day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It also decided to erect a permanent memorial at the UN.

In his [message](#) marking the Day of Remembrance, General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim emphasised it was important to recognise the “unspeakable cruelty” that persisted today in the various modern forms of slavery, such as bonded labour and slavery by descent, forced recruitment of child labour and child soldiers, human trafficking and the illegal sex trade. To address the serious threat posed by human trafficking, Mr Kerim is to convene a special meeting of the Assembly on June 3.

Artist and human rights activist Harry Belafonte, said “slavery is still with us and it has been codified and it has been driven underground because the symbols that once identified slavery have long since gone. But although slavery still exists, it now comes under new codifications,” he said, citing child prostitution and recruitment of children for armed conflict.

NEPAL REPORTS CAUSE UN CONCERN

The United Nations human rights officials in Nepal have expressed deep concern at the arbitrary arrest and detention of several hundred people in the capital, Kathmandu, apparently on the grounds that they were involved in protests related to recent developments in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China (25/3/08).

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) in Nepal issued a statement this week saying that it had been informed that a number of prominent human rights defenders were among those arrested in Kathmandu, which could number as many as 475.

“These actions by police violate individuals’ basic rights to freedom from arbitrary detention and freedom of movement, in addition to impairing the individuals’ rights to peaceful assembly and expression,” OHCHR-Nepal stated.

The Office – which promised to monitor events closely and continue to communicate its concerns to Nepalese authorities – said it had received reports that some people were arrested on the basis of their appearance and assumed political opinions.

Richard Bennett, the representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal, said such arrests were a form of unlawful discrimination. The Office stressed that Nepal is obligated under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to uphold the right of all persons to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

“While it is permissible to limit these rights where necessary to protect such interests as public order, a Government cannot suppress demonstrations merely on the basis of disagreement with the political opinions expressed.”

Both Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour have voiced concern about the situation in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

EX- GUANTANAMO PROSECUTOR QUILTS

The air force lawyer who quit as chief prosecutor for the Guantanamo war court five months ago because of what he called political interference has asked to leave the US military, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (27/3/08).

As chief prosecutor at Guantanamo Bay for two years, Colonel Davis was a fierce advocate for the military commissions created by the Bush Administration to try suspected terrorists outside regular US military and civilian courts. (Australian David Hicks was held at Guantanamo Bay - Ed).

Moe Davis resigned in October, alleging Pentagon officials had exerted political influence in an effort to rush through high-profile charges and approved the use of torture-tainted evidence. He became a hero to the human rights groups that had long excoriated him and a potential defence witness for prisoners he had charged as prosecutor.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/26/1206207206733.html>

AUSTRALIA

SENATE COMMITTEE SEEKS REVIEW OF AGE PENSION LEVELS

Fifteen recommendations were offered by the Standing Committee on Community Affairs in a March report on A Decent Quality of Life Inquiry into the cost of living pressures on older Australians, urging the Federal Government to review base pension levels, particularly for single older people.

The committee also recommended that the government continue to review incentives and initiatives related to superannuation savings to encourage greater savings for older people in vulnerable groups, "In particular this review should consider measures that will ensure a reasonable standard of living for older people, especially women, those on below average incomes, those who have lived with long-term chronic illnesses and those whose earning capacity has been greatly limited by their caring responsibilities."

The government should also monitor the usage and impact of older people accessing reverse mortgages and other similar products, including their effect on the eligibility of older people for government benefits and pensions, the committee recommended.

The government should also consider financial initiatives to assist older people to continue to contribute to the community as volunteers and to encourage greater involvement in the labour market among older people to improve the quality of life in retirement, contribute to the economy's productivity and reduce the strain on the government's social

REPORT: Inquiry into the cost of living pressures on older Australians.

[Cost of living pressures on older Australians](#)

DETAILS: Committee Secretary on 61 2 6277 3515; community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

JUDGE ORDERS UPGRADED CONDITIONS FOR DEFENDANTS

The 12 defendants in Australia's largest terrorism prosecution are not getting a fair trial, the judge overseeing the case has said, according to the Sydney Morning Herald/AAP (21/3/08). Justice Bernard Bongiorno said in Melbourne the conditions under which the accused were being held were so severe they could cause mental illness and jeopardise their ability to defend themselves.

Justice Bongiorno ordered the men be moved to a new prison and called for their conditions to be upgraded. The accused are charged with being members of a terrorist organisation and other terror-related offences. The trial is expected to continue until at least the end of the year. The judge ordered that it not resume until the men's conditions were improved.

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/20/1205602581457.html>

WOMEN IN CAPE YORK OFFERED LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

Up to 70 Indigenous women from Cape York communities are being offered the opportunity to participate in a leadership workshop in May.

Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin announced details of the workshop during a visit to Cape York with the Member for Leichhardt Jim Turnour.

"The workshop will give Cape York Indigenous women the chance to acquire important leadership skills which are vital for the future of their communities." she said. "These include

personal leadership, values, vision and goal-setting along with skills to promote community development, working with stakeholders, influencing others and leadership within the family. DETAILS: http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/leadership_indigenou...

MAXIMISING 'PROTECTION FOR INDIGENOUS CHILDREN'

Amending the Northern Territory intervention legislation to maximise protection of children from abuse while ensuring the basic human rights of Indigenous people were protected was one of the major elements of a ten-point plan outlined in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Report 2007 tabled in Federal Parliament (20/3/08).

"In putting forth this plan, I note that the newly-elected Federal Government has emphasised the importance of ensuring that the NT intervention is consistent with Australia's human rights obligations," Mr Calma said. "For as long as the NT intervention allows the conduct of racially discriminatory actions, it will lack legitimacy among Aboriginal people and communities, as well as the broader Australian public."

HREOC PRESENTS POSITIVE ACTION BY INDIGENOUS GROUPS

Saying violence and abuse against children and families was a scourge damaging Indigenous communities, he said during 18 months of sustained media coverage about child abuse and family violence, "We've rarely seen or heard how Indigenous people and communities across Australia are taking positive steps to respond to family violence, abuse and neglect.

"The Social Justice Report 2007 contains 19 case studies which show how services generated at the local level, that engage with the community, are staffed with Indigenous people, which involve men and empower women, are the key features of successful attempts to stop violence and abuse in Indigenous communities."

The Native Title Report 2007, also tabled in federal Parliament, called for the Australian native title system to be immediately reviewed and a national native title summit to be held with extensive representation.

Commissioner Calma said the Native Title Act was passed 15 years ago with the intention of protecting and promoting the rights of Indigenous Australians, but the system was now too complex, too legalistic and effectively gridlocked.

The Social Justice Report 2007 and the Native Title Report 2007 will be officially launched in Sydney at Turner Hall, Building B, Ultimo College of TAFE on March 31 at 10am, when the fourth in Commissioner Calma's 'Essentials for Social Justice' speech series will focus on *Protecting Indigenous Children*.

The Social Justice and Native Title Reports are available online at http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/sj_report/sjreport07/
http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/nt_report/ntreport07/

TRAINING TO COMBAT FAMILY VIOLENCE

Efforts to arrest family violence in Indigenous communities will be significantly bolstered by new training for frontline community workers to be delivered by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma announced (27/3/08).

Thirteen community legal education workers from as far afield as Port Augusta, Broome, Tennant Creek and Cape York are beginning intensive five-day training in Sydney in a bid to support Indigenous communities to prevent family violence.

"This training will strengthen the understanding and capacity of community leaders to help stop violence and sexual abuse in Indigenous communities," Commissioner Calma said. "We will be

giving these community legal education workers the extra skills needed to raise awareness in local communities about the relationship between Australian law, customary law and human rights.

“At the end of the training these workers should be able to go back to local communities and into positions where they can work with elders, other agencies, the police and the legal profession to support existing violence prevention projects and develop new ones,” he said.

The training is an initiative of the Intergovernmental Summit on Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in July 2006.

SENATORS RECEIVE INDIGENOUS STATEMENT ON INTERVENTION

Arising out of a NT Intervention Workshop in February, a statement was presented by Walter Shaw on behalf of the National Aboriginal Alliance and the Central Australian Aboriginal Alliance to senators at Parliament House, Canberra, in February. A summary has been forwarded to *UNity*

In summary, the statement said that based on the discussions by the people of the Central Australian Aboriginal Alliance, directly affected by the NT intervention, the workshop concluded the intervention had been unjustified, served no real purpose and was apartheid in nature and design.

It also concluded that the intervention was racially discriminatory and in contravention of human rights charters and contrary to the most recent UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The summary stated the intervention was viewed as the second invasion through what was equivalent to martial law.

The Central Australian Aboriginal Alliance (was) against the intervention and condemned the Federal Government’s approach, particularly when social welfare reforms and child protection were attached to compulsory land acquisition, an unprecedented power never witnessed before in Australia.

The Central Australian Aboriginal Alliance concluded the following points (in reference to the intervention) under the headings of Negatives and Positives:

Negatives:

- It establishes a racist and apartheid regime in the NT;
- It provides unjust and extreme police powers that are analogous to a dictatorial police state;
- It has created immense fear amongst the people, particularly with the arrival of the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Federal Police;
- It affects and hurts people in 72 remote communities;
- It is a weapon to put down the cultural maintenance and makes it extremely difficult for us to maintain our cultural practices. If permitted to continue in its present form it will destroy our cultural religious ties and practices;
- It opens our lands to unwanted intruders, who can and will have free access to our sacred lands and sites. Moreover, if we are trying to achieve alcohol bans and to provide for greater safety of our women and children, then opening the borders will place them at a greater risk;
- It provides for the establishment of a Federal Police task force, set up to place the communities under surveillance and provide intelligence on people’s activities;
- It has caused immense uncertainty and confusion, which is widespread throughout the communities;
- It denies equality before the law;
- It is a lie for the government to argue that without compulsory land acquisition, social welfare reforms and child protection cannot be achieved;

- In compulsorily acquiring our lands, it provides for the freedom of the appointed administrators to approve mining exploration and mining of our mineral wealth without free prior and informed consent.

Positives:

- It has brought together Aboriginal minds to renew our fight as Aboriginal Peoples, who are now more determined to fight for the rights that are ours.
- It highlights and identifies the neglect and poor and inadequate services within our communities with respect to education, health, housing and lack of, and in some cases non-existence, of essential infrastructure.

The Central Australian Aboriginal Alliance, in conjunction with the National Aboriginal Alliance, refuses to accept any racial discrimination by the Government of Australia and the Northern Territory administration against Aboriginal Peoples.

In rejecting racial discrimination in any form, we demand, immediately and unreservedly:

- 1) the restoration of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 in its entirety and without prejudice, so that it can apply to all acts within the Commonwealth of Australia. Racial discrimination in Australian legislation will not be tolerated. In saying this, the Federal Government of Australia must provide a guarantee for future protections against racial discrimination, including the means by which remedies can be found;
- 2) The immediate end to the Northern Territory intervention/invasion and we call upon the Federal Government and NT administration to enter into transparent negotiation with the Aboriginal nations to develop and implement appropriate infrastructure, equal to that of all other citizens of Australia, and development programs that will give rise to the well-being of the Peoples and provide for the safety of our families and secure our communities.

CALL TO FEDERAL MINISTER OVER BACK WAGES

Back wages rightly earned by Aboriginal people in Queensland should be paid said Queensland Senator Andrew Bartlett on Wednesday, urging the Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin to intervene with the Queensland government's continued refusal to pay.

"Six years after their original inadequate response for repaying wages, the state government has not offered one extra cent, and instead has taken a big chunk of the money back and continued to exclude many people from receiving anything," the senator claimed.

An all-party Senate inquiry initiated by Senator Bartlett in 2006 unanimously found major injustices had occurred in regard to 'Stolen Wages' which had not been properly remedied. The previous federal government did not respond to the inquiry's recommendations.

BILL FOR CHILDRENS' COMMISSIONER

Senator Bartlett recently 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," he 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." DETAILS: Tracee McPate on 0417 607 655.

E. HEALTH & MEANS

FOOD

WFP FUNDS REEL UNDER HIGHER COSTS TO FEED 73M PEOPLE

The UN agency that is feeding 73 million people caught up in crises around the world this year is appealing for funding to close a \$500 million gap caused by a global spike in food and fuel prices.

"We urge your government to act quickly on this request so that we may avoid cutting the rations for those who rely on the world to stand by them during times of abject need," Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the World Food Program ([WFP](#)), said in a letter to donors (20/3/08).

The price of food and fuel has risen to record levels in recent years, shooting up at an aggressive pace of 55 per cent since June 2007, Ms Sheeran said, stating that WFP had taken many steps to mitigate the increases, including buying 80 per cent of its food supplies in local and regional markets.

Due to the sharp price rises, however, the new estimated figure to cover this year's projects across 78 countries is \$3.4 billion, which does not include unforeseen emergency operations, the agency said.

Rising prices also mean that the world's poorest people will have to spend a larger proportion of their income on food, the agency said, and they will buy less food, food that is less nutritious, or rely on aid.

"Our efforts will include working with governments, UN agencies and other partners to address long-term solutions while we tackle these urgent needs," Ms. Sheeran said.

Countries where price rises are expected to have a direct impact include Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Haiti, Djibouti, the Gambia, Tajikistan, Togo, Chad, Benin, Myanmar, Cameroon, Niger, Senegal, Yemen and Cuba, according to WFP.

CRACKDOWN ON RICE HOARDERS

President of the Philippines Gloria Macapagal Arroyo has ordered a crackdown on rice hoarders, as her government tried to blunt the impact of rice shortages that could fuel public unrest.

She appealed to traders not to artificially raise the price of rice, the country's staple food. The price has risen by nearly 50 per cent since January, official statistics show. Prices of oil and basic household commodities have also soared.

Officials said some traders had been buying the subsidised rice and stockpiling it to sell months later at higher prices. The Philippines, once Asia's leading rice producer, is now its leading rice importer, says the Ibon Foundation, a research group. Last year it imported 1.8 million tonnes of rice, or 16 per cent of its needs, mainly from Vietnam and Thailand.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/26/1206207206727.html>

NORTH KOREA FACES FOOD SHORTAGE AGAIN

North Korea is facing food shortage levels not seen since the country's disastrous 1990s famine as rising prices and political disputes over aid threaten supply. Pyongyang has indicated a willingness to tie additional food aid from South Korea to humanitarian concerns but expressed an eagerness to separate the food situation from discussions over its nuclear programs.

[AlertNet.org/Reuters](#) (26/3/08).

HEALTH

MAJOR SUCCESS AGAINST POLIO IN SOMALIA

Described as a major victory in the global fight against polio, the UN health agency announced that the disease had been eradicated in strife-torn Somalia, thanks to the efforts of some 10,000 volunteers and health workers (25/3/08).

"Against a backdrop of widespread conflict, large population movements and a dearth of functioning government infrastructure, transmission of poliovirus in the country has been successfully stopped," the UN World Health Organisation (WHO) said in a [news release](#).

Somalia has not reported a case of polio since March 2007, a major landmark in the intensified eradication effort launched last year to eradicate the disease in a few remaining countries, according to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, which is spearheaded by national governments, WHO, Rotary International, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)).

Innovative approaches tailored to conflict areas are being credited for stopping polio – which can cause lifelong paralysis – in the country, including increased community involvement and the effective use of monovalent vaccines to immunise children in insecure areas with several doses, within a short period of time. More than 10,000 Somali volunteers and health workers repeatedly vaccinated more than 1.8 million children under the age of five by visiting every household in every settlement multiple times.

BAN URGES RENEWED FIGHT AGAINST TB

The theme for World TB Day this year was 'I am stopping TB' and it was a pledge "we must uphold as we battle the epidemic throughout the year and into the future," UN Secretary General Ban said in a [message](#).

"If we are to prevent a virtually untreatable TB epidemic, we must tackle the roots of the problem: poor services, poor supplies, poor prescribing and poor use of drugs," he said. The fight against TB "can be won only with the collective commitment of millions of individuals – donors and researchers, doctors and health-care workers, patients and family members."

As a result of collaboration, the proportion of people falling ill with TB was declining but not keeping up with population growth. The disease became ever more deadly when it overlapped with the HIV epidemic. He urged a stepped up global response to save lives from TB, saying the UN will convene a Global Leaders' HIV/TB Forum in June.

POOR COUNTRIES JEOPARDISE 'HEALTH OF RICH COUNTRIES'

A primary focus on AIDS and lack of access to cheap life-saving medication has left the world potentially facing an epidemic of virtually untreatable tuberculosis (TB), an ANU academic warned (24/3/08).

Senior Research Fellow at the University's Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Dr Michael Selgelid said more needed to be done to stop the spread of TB - a disease that still kills 1.7 million people each year.

"The global TB status quo is shameful," said Dr Selgelid. "Though cures have existed since the 1950s, TB is still the second leading infectious cause of mortality - a close runner up to AIDS. One third of the world population is infected with latent TB and 10 per cent of these are expected to develop active illness at some time in their lives.

"It's astonishing that TB has largely escaped the attention of bioethicists ... while AIDS has been highly politicised, TB has primarily affected the poor so there hasn't been as much advocacy of TB control in the rich countries where most bioethicists work.

"Developed countries must do more to improve health care in developing countries," he said. There were straightforward self-interested reasons - bad health in poor countries jeopardised the health of populations in Australia and other rich countries.

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

2.6 BILLION 'DO NOT HAVE HOME SANITATION'

Sixty-two per cent of Africans do not have access to an improved sanitation facility - a proper toilet - which separates human waste from human contact, according to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation.

A global report will be published later this year but preliminary data on the situation in Africa was released this week as part of World Water Day 2008. The day, built around the theme that 'Sanitation matters', seeks to draw attention to the plight of some 2.6 billion people around the world who live without access to home sanitation.

Ann M. Veneman, UNICEF Executive Director said the absence of adequate sanitation had a serious impact on health and social development, especially for children. "Investments in improving sanitation will accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and save lives," she said.

AID AGENCIES URGE WORLD TO ACT ON SOMALIA CRISIS

Somalia's massive humanitarian crisis continues to worsen with every passing month due to continuing violence, drought and food shortages, a group of 40 aid agencies led by Oxfam said on Wednesday. The agencies - whose warning came ahead of a UN Security Council discussion on Thursday on how best to promote peace there - called on the international community to help thousands of Somalis in desperate need. [BBC](#) (26/3/08), [AlertNet.org/Reuters](#) (26/3/08).

WINNING FIGHT AGAINST GUINEA WORM

Some 3.5 million Africans and Asians were sick with guinea worm in 1986, but thanks to campaigns by groups such as the World Health Organisation and UNICEF, fewer than 10,000 people now suffer from the gruesome disease, former US President Jimmy Carter writes in *TIME*. "Today, I'm happy to say, we are tackling the last cases," he writes. [TIME](#) (20/3/08).

COAG REACHES AGREEMENT ON HEALTH

An agreement on health and productivity reform was agreed on Wednesday at the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) meeting in Adelaide, when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced the Federal Government would inject \$500 million into public hospitals, fund 50,000 new health training places and set up a national registration system for health professionals, the ABC reported (26/3/08).

The Prime Minister's website reported that COAG agreed to the implementation of health reform in three stages and that a major step towards improving Australia's health system was the signing of an Intergovernmental Agreement on the health workforce. This agreement would for the first time create a single national registration and accreditation system for nine health professions: medical practitioners.

COAG agreed that Skills Australia would be asked to advise COAG at its July 2008 meeting on the possible allocation of up to 50,000 additional vocational education and training places over three years from 2008-09 for areas of national skills shortage in health occupations (including vocationally-trained nursing, emergency care and allied health occupations).

The meeting also agreed key health reform priorities for further work ahead of consideration of proposals by COAG no later than October 2008.

WEBSITE: http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2008/media_release_0147.cfm

G. MEDIA MATTERS

CHINA URGED TO ALLOW FREE MEDIA ACCESS TO LHASA

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has urged Chinese authorities to allow free media access to enter and report from Lhasa, Tibet following unrest that has plagued the region since March 14.

Chinese authorities have been selectively allowing foreign journalists to enter Lhasa from March 26, only by arrangement with the provincial government.

The federation welcomed this slight increase in the freedom of movement of journalists following the Chinese Government's orders to force journalists, including more than 15 Hong Kong journalists, to leave Tibet from March 17.

Despite this small positive step, the IFJ said there had been an unacceptable breach of both the '*Service Guide for Foreign Media Coverage of the Beijing Olympic Games and the Preparatory Period*' and the '*Measures for the Reporting Activities in the Mainland Conducted by the Journalists of Hong Kong and Macau during the Beijing Olympic Games and the Preparatory Period*', both issued by the Beijing Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) with the support of the Chinese Government.

According to regulations on reporting in both guides, journalists needed only to obtain prior consent from interviewees to interview organisations or individuals in China. These regulations were to come into force from January 1 2007 and will expire on October 17 2008.

In addition, the guide for journalists from Hong Kong and Macau states, "If security issues arise when foreign journalists are covering public on-the-spot news, they can ask for help from the security or aid officials." This suggests the Chinese authorities should assist rather than hinder journalists' work.

The Foreign Journalists' Guide states, "Foreign journalists can carry out reporting activities not only on the Beijing Olympic Games and the preparatory period, but also on politics, economy, society and culture of China."

By denying freedom of movement of journalists and restricting media freedoms, the Chinese Government appeared to be departing from the regulations in the guides and limiting access to information. The selection of particular journalists and the apparent screening of news by the authorities was unacceptable and did not promote free and fair coverage.

"This selective arrangement is not good enough to ease international suspicions that the Chinese Government is clouding certain facts regarding the recent unrest in Tibet," said IFJ Asia-Pacific Director Jacqueline Park, on Wednesday.

"It would be in China's interests, as the host of the 2008 Olympic Games, to promote press freedom and encourage transparency. The expulsion and screening of journalists appears to call into question China's commitment to the free media regulations implemented in January 2007."

TWO MORE JOURNALISTS KILLED IN RUSSIA

A television journalist was found dead in a Moscow apartment on Friday with a belt around his neck and numerous stab wounds — a grisly murder that reinforces Russia's image as one of the most dangerous countries for reporters, Yahoo News reported (21/3/08).

Hours after the body was discovered, an executive in charge of the provincial state TV station in the victim's home region in southern Russia was shot to death by unidentified men, and police were looking for links between the two killings.

More than a dozen journalists have been slain in contract-style killings and others have been beaten since 2000. Many appear to have been targeted because of their attempts to dig into allegations of corruption. Charges have rarely been filed, including in the 2006 slaying in Moscow of Anna Politkovskaya, an investigative reporter who won acclaim for her reporting of atrocities against civilians in war-scarred Chechnya.

Reports suggest it was unlikely the killing of Channel One journalist Ilyas Shurpayev, 32, was linked to his reporting as he worked for a station controlled by the Kremlin. He moved to Moscow

last month from Dagestan, a part of the North Caucasus region that sees frequent violence.
REPORT: http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080321/ap_on_re_eu/russia_journalist_killed_2

SRI LANKA: The Sri Lanka's Government has appointed a recently retired army Major General to a senior position at the troubled state broadcaster, Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) (20/3/08). The appointment came as authorities released three journalists after almost two weeks. Two other journalists, arrested at the same time, remained in custody, the International Federation Journalists reported.

According to Free Media Movement (FMM), Major General Sunil Silva, formerly head of the Army Signals Regiment, has been appointed Additional Deputy Director General, Administration, at SLRC, a newly created post. The appointment follows a threatened strike by SLRC staff after threats and attacks on staff allegedly linked to a melee involving a government minister and the news director.

FMM reported this week that the Minister of Labour Mervyn Silva threatened MTV/MBC journalists covering the opening of a flyover bridge in his electorate on March 20 and alleged he used abusive language.

Susil Kindelpitiya, Director of News at MTV/MBC, has lodged a complaint with the Inspector General of Police (IGP). On December 27 Minister Silva was reported to have assaulted the news director of the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC), Sri Lanka's main public television broadcaster. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

LETTER TO SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT

The IFJ has sent a joint letter to the President of Sri Lanka voicing the concerns from over 30 journalists' associations and press freedom and human rights organisations across the globe for the safety of Sri Lankan journalists.

Addressed to Mr Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Socialist Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka, the letter demands an immediate change to the escalating culture of violence against journalists by government officials and members of the public.

This letter is the first of a series of actions for the 'Stop the War on Journalists' campaign for Sri Lanka which will culminate with World Press Freedom Day on May 3 and the release of the IFJ's annual South Asia Press Freedom Report for 2007-2008.

A global day of action has been called for April 10, which falls two days before Sri Lanka's Sinhala and Tamil New Year celebrations, to send a message of hope and strength to the band of journalists' organisations in Sri Lanka that have continued their fight for press freedom despite dangerous circumstances involving high risks to their own and families' safety.

ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN DIALOGUE BETWEEN ARABS AND THE WEST

The Foundation of Abdul Aziz Saud Al-Babtain is to hold a seminar to discuss the 'Role of the Media in dialogue between Arabs and the West' over March 30/31 in the library of Abdul Aziz Saud Al-Babtain, Kuwait.

The foundation stated this week that prominent members of the media and international commentators, politicians and activists in cross-cultural dialogue had been invited to attend, stating that never had there been a time in modern history for such a need to discuss the role of the media, and its influence on the dialogue between these two vast civilisations.

For the Kuwaiti press, Mr Al-Babtain stated that the seminar was considered as a continuation of the previous seminar held in March 2007 entitled '*Arabs in the Western Media*'. "We have invited 35 top international journalists to achieve our ultimate goal, of delivering our sincere message of peace, through dialogue," he said. "The world is facing consistent clashes

and wars, in these times it is essential for the benefit of our global community to reach peaceful solutions through the practice and discipline of dialogue. In this seminar we hope to achieve these great hopes."

Four sessions over two days are expected to involve participants from America, Britain, France, Germany, Scandinavia, and the wider Middle East. The foundation will host its first session in the English and French.

DETAILS: Toby Halloran on tr2@albabtainprize.org / tmfhalloran@gmail.com ; on +965 6849507; www.albabtainprize.org; <http://www.albabtainprize.org/Seminar-e.html>; email: kw@albabtainprize.org; on +965 2406816; fax on +965 2455039.

BILLIONAIRES EAGER TO BUY NEWSPAPERS

Billionaire [Denis O'Brien](#) continues pouring money into newspapers, reports Forbes Magazine (25/3/08). The cellphone magnate recently raised his stake in Independent News & Media even as circulation at the company's flagship paper wanes. Not to be outdone, [Anthony O'Reilly](#), a fellow Irish billionaire and chief executive of the Dublin, Ireland, newspaper publisher, is also adding to his position.

Even though less people are picking up newspapers, billionaires are eager to pick up the companies that publish them. [Rupert Murdoch](#), fresh off his \$5.6 billion acquisition of *The Wall Street Journal*, is now eyeing *Newsday*. The paper could reportedly sell for \$400 million.

REPORT: http://www.forbes.com/2008/03/24/billionaires-newspapers-zell-biz-billies-cx_af_0324paperbillies.html?partner=media_newsletter

H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

LIFE IN THE 'OPEN PRISON' OF GAZA

This is a tiny strip of land and its life is being drained out of it, the BBC reported (15/3/08). For years, the spirit of those living here has taken a pounding, not only from the frequent Israeli military attacks but also by fighting between the various Palestinian factions here. But now the territory's near-complete isolation - brought about by the blockade - may be delivering the final blows to hope. "It's like being on death row," I am frequently told and almost every Gazan you speak to talks of his land being an "open prison". That open prison analogy was once made to me by Nael al Kurdi, a softly spoken young man from Sheikh Radwan in Gaza City.

ARTICLE: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/7296750.stm

TIBET ISSUE AND THE INDIAN REACTION

The eruption of violence and the vandalism in Lhasa, capital of China's Tibet Autonomous Region, and the Indian reaction to it raise some profound questions, M.K. Bhadrakumar, former ambassador, Indian Foreign Service, writes in *The Hindu* (24/3/08). "Any casual visitor to Dharamsala on the Indo-Tibetan border, seat of the so-called Tibetan 'government-in-exile,' can make out that the recent violence in Lhasa was anticipated well beforehand by the Tibetan activists based in that Himalayan hamlet ... We should know that it is the tragic history of our region that the western powers fish in troubled waters. And at this point in contemporary history, Asia is on the West's radar screen as a potential locomotive of growth of the world economy. Thus, the visit of the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, to India should have been kept as a bilateral exchange ... She made provocative statements against China from Indian soil. China has taken exception to Ms Pelosi's interference in its internal affairs."

ARTICLE: <http://www.hindu.com/2008/03/24/stories/2008032455131000.htm>

MISSIONARIES BETTER, SAYS ARNHEM LEADER

Thousands of Aboriginal children in remote communities are still waking up to no breakfast nine months after the \$1.5 billion federal intervention, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, the Northern Territory's most powerful Aboriginal leader, warned, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (27/3/08). Children

as young as 12 were still vulnerable to sexual abuse and manipulation by men selling alcohol, drugs and pornography in the mining town of Nhulunbuy in north-east Arnhem land. Mr Yunupingu, a former Australian of the Year, called for the intervention taskforce to urgently build missionary-style dormitories in the communities where children could be fed, clothed and cleaned. He said he would not shy away from criticism that the dormitories would be a return to the days last century when missionaries ran the communities.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/26/1206207207326.html>

SIGNS OF CHANGE AS AURUKUN MOVES TO STOP DESTRUCTION

Dennis Julian points to a row of bent and twisted Toyotas and shakes his head. The vehicles are in various states of disrepair. All have had their ignition wires torn out, others have been driven into trees or through the steel gates of the Aurukun Shire Council yard, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (27/3/08). "This is what the politicians don't see," Julian says. In the past six months Aurukun's shire mechanic has spent almost \$50,000 repairing cars that were stolen, then driven until they crashed, broke down or ran out of fuel. What is remarkable about this graveyard of wrecks is most of the damage was caused by boys as young as 10. Vandalism of public assets is such an entrenched problem that this week community women told the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, in a closed meeting that they wanted action to rescue the troubled children. Yesterday they received it.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/26/1206207207329.html>