

# 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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## A. UNITED NATIONS & AGENCIES

### AUSTRALIA TO BID FOR SECURITY COUNCIL SPOT

Australia will seek election to the United Nations Security Council for 2013-2014, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd told a press conference at the UN in New York on Sunday (30/3/08). He said there would be a ballot in 2012 and the reason for indicating Australia's interest in candidature for the UN Security Council was that the pre-balloting processes begin very early and it was important to declare Australia's intention.

"If Australia is elected to the UN Security Council at that time, it will nearly be 30 years since Australia was last on the Security Council," he said. "We were last there in 1986. Australia was a member of the Security Council in the 1940s, in the 1950s and then again in 1973, and then again in 1986. It's been a long time between drinks, and therefore the time has come to put our best foot forward and we believe that to be a fully effective member of the United Nations you need, on a regular basis, also to be an effective member of the Security Council as well."

On Friday an ABC report stated that France had indicated it would support an Australian bid.

Mr Rudd and Australia's Permanent Representative at the UN, Robert Hill, met with the UN Secretary-General to discuss several matters, including Australia's involvement in the United Nations overall, the UN Mission in Afghanistan; climate change; and UN operations in Darfur.

"The Australian Government is a strong supporter of the United Nations system," Mr Rudd said. "Many people criticise the United Nations for its failings. I believe it's important to see the cup as being half full, rather than half empty, and for people of good will to support the activities of the United Nations around the world."

"We need to enhance the UN activities in terms of multilateral security, multilateral economic engagement, and also in the area of social policy and human rights as well - and on top of that, climate change and the environment. To be fully effective in that, we have to be fully engaged with the United Nations, and that is what we intend to do."

In answer to press questions, Mr Rudd said if a nation is a member of the United Nations Security Council, "you are an active and direct participant in the key decision-making body of the United Nations on all security policy matters. As you will recall, whether it was the debate over the Iraq war; whether it's the consideration of particular actions against the Government of Iran; whether it's other matters; this is the critical decision-making body of the United Nations. Therefore, if you wish to be an effective member of the United Nations organisation, it means that you must express a regular interest in being a member of the Security Council. All security policy matters of multilateral significance are before the council ... Australia has an interest, therefore, in being there."

He thought Mr Ban would have concluded from their talks that Australia was back in business. "We take the UN multilateral system seriously," Mr Rudd said. "Remember, there are three pillars of Australia's foreign policy. Our alliance with the United States, our membership of the United Nations, and our policy of comprehensive engagement in Asia, and we are prosecuting all three."

Mr Rudd commented "Being Secretary-General of the UN is a very tough job. You are ultimately at the disposal of the member states. Secretary-Generals are often criticised for failing to act on X, Y and Z, A, B and C. Actual political will, ultimately, resides in the hands of nations states themselves and I think that should always be borne in mind for those to choose to unnecessarily attack the principal office bearers of the UN."

## **DISCUSSIONS COVERED AFGHANISTAN**

The prime minister said Afghanistan had been a subject of considerable discussions with President Bush, the US Secretary of State, the US Secretary of Defence in Washington, and the Secretary-General of the UN Mission in Kabul. For a long-term effective strategy for Afghanistan, "We need to have the full integration of the civilian effort and the military effort in a coordinated strategy in order to ensure success," Mr Rudd said. The UN Secretary-General and he will again attend the Bucharest Conference.

## **DARFUR**

Mr Ban and he discussed the continued obstruction by the Sudan Government. "The people of Darfur are suffering. We need to give effect to the resolve already achieved by the UN to employ a force," Mr Rudd said. Australia would make available up to nine military officers to assist with the force in Darfur, as part of the UN Assistance Mission in Darfur. The commitment was consistent with those made by UK and Canada. Australia would provide a further \$5 million in humanitarian assistance. The Darfur situation needed to be brought back to the UN Security Council soon so the Sudan Government could be held properly to account.

"Progress so far is too slow, but we've still got time to turn the corner, but let me tell you we've got to get cracking and I think the Secretary-General is being realistic in his concerns."

## **DR RAMOS HORTA'S CRITICISM**

Asked about President Ramos Horta's criticism of both the UN Police and separately of the Australian troops at the time of an attempt on his life, Mr Rudd replied that the UN had expressed its appreciation for the early action by Australia in deploying further troops and further police to East Timor within 24 hours of the attempted assassination of Jose Ramos Horta and on Xanana Gusmao.

Regarding statements attributed to Jose Ramos Horta, the UN already had underway its own internal investigation, Mr Rudd said, adding that he had "absolute, unqualified, confidence in the absolute professionalism of all Australian military personnel associated with the events of that day, including ensuring that Jose got to hospital in order to have his life saved by a hospital which was located on the Australian military base in Dili."

## **CHINA**

"The truth is that we've had human rights abuses in China over time. I have said that in the past. At present they are particularly manifest when it comes to Tibet," he said. "I believe the right course of action is for the government in China to exercise restraint. I also, as I indicated in my remarks yesterday with the President of the United States, that it's important for the Chinese, through their intermediaries, to engage with the Dalai Lama and his intermediaries. I think that would be a right and useful way ahead."

## **PROPOSAL WOULD EXPAND SECURITY COUNCIL**

An interim proposal to tackle the divisive issue of Security Council reform would expand the UN's most powerful body from 15 to 22 members but leave it up to the 192 UN member states to decide which countries should fill them, AP reported (21/3/08).

The proposal would also leave it up to UN members to decide how long the new seats should be held — with suggestions of two years, five years and permanently offered as possible options. It left the contentious issue of veto power to future negotiations.

There is strong support for enlarging the Security Council to reflect the world today rather than the global power structure after World War II when the United Nations was created, but all previous attempts, starting in 1979, have failed because national and regional rivalries blocked agreement on the size and composition of an expanded council, the report continued.

The deep divisions forced the General Assembly to shelve three rival resolutions to expand the council in 2005. The so-called Group of Four — Germany, Japan, Brazil and India — aspire to permanent seats without veto rights on a 25-member council. A group of middle-ranking countries, including Italy and Pakistan, who call themselves Uniting for Consensus, want a 25-member council with 10 new non-permanent seats.

The African Union, whose 53 members argue that their continent is the only one without a permanent seat on the council, wants to add 11 new seats — six permanent seats including two for Africa with veto power, and five non-permanent seats.

The new proposal says these groups maintain their positions, but the impossibility of achieving them now "has pointed to an apparent willingness to negotiate on the basis of achieving intermediate reform, through the identification of the highest common denominator at this stage."

More than 50 ambassadors representing all the major groups with a stake in reforming the council attended a meeting on Tuesday hosted by Germany's UN Ambassador Thomas Matussek to discuss the new proposal. He told reporters all the groups were represented, many had ideas on how to improve the proposal, and "for the first time the Africans engaged in meaningful discussion."

The proposal was submitted to General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim on Thursday, Germany's UN Mission said. He is expected to study it and have members of his task force on council reform consult groups with differing views. Mr Kerim also received separate letters from Italy and the African Group.

Of the seven new council seats in the proposal, two would be allocated to African countries, two to Asian countries, one to Latin America and the Caribbean, one to Western Europe and one to Eastern Europe. The proposal also calls for a mandatory review of the reforms after a fixed period and sets out new working methods for the council, many to promote better communications and openness on its operations.

One proposal appeals to the five veto-wielding council members — the US, Russia, China, Britain and France — to ensure that a veto would not be used to continue the commission of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. The proposal was drafted by the ambassadors from the Netherlands, Romania, Malaysia, Britain, Cyprus and Germany, with support from the Bahamas and strong input from Italy, Mr Matussek said.

### **ENSURING RIGHTS ARE HONOURED**

The group working up an Optional Protocol (OP) to the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) held its final session from 31 March 31 to April 4, Civil Liberties Australia reported this week..

"If the OP is finalised, an official version will go the Human Rights Council in Geneva for adoption," says Juliet Rossi of the NGO Coalition for the Optional Protocol steering committee. "If approved there, the OP goes to the UN General Assembly for adoption and then ratifying by states.

"The OP will make it possible for individuals, groups or organisations to seek justice at the international level for violations of economic, social and cultural rights by submitting complaints to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," she said.

"The adoption of the Optional Protocol will also provide support to efforts to get greater recognition of economic, social and cultural rights in domestic law and before courts, and will strengthen our monitoring role, as civil society organisations."

But some countries want a so-called 'à la carte' OP, under which they would be able to treat the ICESCR as a menu of rights and specify which rights they would be willing to accept complaints

on. "As most countries back a comprehensive instrument covering all levels of rights and obligations in the ICESCR, the few countries who don't want that outcome have to be lobbied to change or reserve their position," Ms Rossi said.

Some states are also pushing to include additional admissibility criteria such as the requirement that a complainant demonstrates that he/she has suffered "significant disadvantage" and to set a very high threshold for finding a violation.

The NGO Coalition for the OP-ICESCR is appealing to Austria, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom to lobby them to change or reserve their position, so as not to water down the OP too much. DETAILS: Julieta Rossi [jrossi@escr-net.org](mailto:jrossi@escr-net.org)

### **YOUNG OVER-THE-TOP PROTESTORS STAY TO LUNCH**

A group of 21 Tibetans, aged between 15 and 18, climbed into the UN compound in Kathmandu and then peacefully presented a banner to UN staff with slogans along the lines of 'Free Tibet' (28/3/08). After apologising for entering the compound, the teenagers were given lunch and then taken home. The UN asked local authorities not to take any action against them.

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

### **CLIMATE CHANGE LOOMS 'AND THE WORLD WAITS'**

The world was waiting anxiously for a durable and economically feasible solution to the pressing issue of climate change, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told participants at the latest round of UN-sponsored talks as they began in Bangkok (31/3/08).

People are hoping for a solution which is "based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities" and "strikes the delicate balance between globally inclusive action and the need to eradicate poverty," Mr Ban said in a video [message](#) to the opening of the five-day meeting.

He told 1,200 participants that he understood the "huge responsibility" they had in negotiating a successor pact to the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012. "But the state of our planet requires you to be ambitious – in what you aim for, and equally, in how hard you work to reach agreement."

The Bangkok meeting was expected to lay out a work plan for the negotiations which will conclude in 2009 at a major summit in Copenhagen, Denmark. It was also anticipated that this gathering – attended by delegates from 163 nations – would further efforts regarding emission reduction targets for developed countries.

Top UN climate change official Yvo de Boer pointed out that three months had already elapsed since the close of the Bali conference. "This leaves us with around one and a half years – a very short time-frame within which to complete negotiations on one of the most complex international agreements that history has ever seen," he [said](#). Yvo de Boer, is Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)).

"The challenge for the region's developing countries is whether they can switch to a less polluting pattern while maintaining the growth and development they require," Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)), [said](#) at the Bangkok meeting.

"We need a global solidarity based upon genuine North-South and South-South partnerships of governments, as developing countries cannot do this alone."

She underscored that global warming was no longer a distant threat for many countries in the region. "It is a reality and a sign of what lies ahead. For many of our Pacific island states, it is a looming question of their survival or extinction."

#### **NO MAJOR DECISIONS EXPECTED YET**

No major decisions were expected from the Bangkok talks, which are being held primarily to establish a timetable for more negotiation rounds, culminating in a UN climate change conference in Denmark at the end of next year, the ABC's Radio Australia reported on Monday .

Yvo de Boer, head of the UN Climate Change Secretariat, says the process towards forging a new agreement was likely to be fraught with disagreement over which countries should bear principle responsibility for reducing greenhouse gases.

"The challenge is to design a future agreement that will significantly step up action on adaptation, successfully halt the increase in global emissions within the next 10-15 years and dramatically cut back emissions by 2050," he said.

The European Union wants industrialised countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions by up to 40 percent below the levels they were at in 1990, by 2020. However the United States continues to reject compulsory national reduction targets, and says it should not be forced to make cuts that might harm its economy unless China and India agree to the same. Japan, which has struggled to meet its reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol suggested using 2005 rather than 1990 as the benchmark for reductions.

#### **UN-LED SUMMIT STARTS TACKLING NEW CLIMATE CHANGE DEAL**

Delegates from 163 countries on Monday began negotiations at a United Nations-led summit in Bangkok, to hammer out a global consensus on climate change that will produce the successor to the Kyoto Treaty. The week-long meeting is certain to generate debate on such issues as how rich nations best can help poor countries deal with the effects of global warming. [CNN/Associated Press](#) (31/3/08).

#### **HEAD OF UN CLIMATE BODY WANTS TO KEEP EMISSIONS BASE YEAR**

Yvo de Boer, head of the UN' climate agency, that is hosting the Bangkok meeting, said he disagrees with a proposal by Japan to change the base year for emission cuts from 1990 to 2005. The focus needs to be on how much greenhouse gas emissions countries can cut, he said. [Google/Agence France-Presse](#) (31/3/08).

#### **CHINESE PROPOSAL GETS US THUMBS DOWN**

A proposal by China that would have developed countries contribute 0.5 per cent of their GDP every year towards the global fight against climate change was not reasonable, the US climate negotiator Harlan Watson said at the UN-led meeting in Bangkok. But he also added that the proposal is an "interesting suggestion" for discussion (31/3/08). [Bloomberg](#) or [http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=atHRfXGgR9bc&refer=latin\\_america](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601086&sid=atHRfXGgR9bc&refer=latin_america)

#### **RUDD: CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRESS TOO SLOW**

International progress on fighting climate change was too slow, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon have agreed, the Australian reported (30/3/08).

Mr Rudd emerged from a half-hour meeting with the UN head in New York promising to support Mr Ban's moves to speed up work ahead of next year's Copenhagen climate change conference. The Copenhagen conference, to be held in November 2009, is expected to develop long-term greenhouse gas emissions targets for beyond 2012 when the Kyoto protocol expires.

But international negotiations have stalled since last December's Bali talks, prompting Mr Ban to consider appointing special envoys to speed up the process, Mr Rudd said. "Progress so far is

too slow but we've still got time to turn the corner," Mr Rudd said. "But let me tell you, we've got to get cracking and I think the secretary-general's been realistic in his concerns."

Mr Rudd said Mr Ban was concerned about delays in the negotiating process. "He himself has decided to convene a number of representatives of the critical host states, namely Indonesia, Poland and Denmark, to assist in facilitating this process of bringing it to a more rapid conclusion and to achieve more substantial progress on the way through," he said.

"He's also considering the appointment of key special envoys to accelerate the climate change negotiating process." Mr Rudd said Australia was fully committed to supporting Mr Ban's activities.

In an address to the US Chamber of Commerce, in Washington, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said that climate change was the great moral and economic challenge of our time, requiring a combination of effective domestic and global action (31/3/08).

"Globally, the change that we must achieve over coming decades in response to the climate threat is as great in scale as the Industrial Revolution," he said. "We must move to a low carbon economy. That will mean a profound shift in the Australian economy and in the global economy.

"We will have to make that shift in a way that maintains our competitiveness. That is why we need a global approach to climate change.

"Australia is the world's largest exporter of coal. For us, developing clean coal technology is a crucial part of our response to climate change. That's why we're investing in accelerating the development and deployment of these technologies – the government working with the private sector to find commercially viable solutions to climate change."

The low carbon revolution would open up new opportunities in new sectors. "Global arrangements need to support and encourage the trade in clean and green technology," he said. "The other crucial element to meeting the challenges of climate change is establishing an effective international framework."

### **PACIFIC NEIGHBOURS FACE RISING SEA LEVELS AND EPIDEMICS: AUSAID REPORT**

Australia's 15 neighbours in the Pacific face daunting challenges to overcome alarming levels of poverty and some smaller states have uncertain futures, a report by AusAID says (31/3/08).

The report, which looks at social and economic conditions in 14 countries in the Pacific plus East Timor, says the region faces serious challenges including rising sea levels, epidemics of malaria, diabetes and HIV and surging oil prices. But it says long-term growth is possible and areas such as transport and aviation have begun to improve, according to the Sydney Morning Herald.

"Many [of the countries] face growing health problems, increasing environmental threats (including climate change), high levels of joblessness and poverty, and population pressures," the report says. "Without higher, sustained economic growth these challenges will not be effectively addressed ... Some of the poorest countries - PNG, Timor Leste and Solomon Islands - have the highest mountains to climb."

The report, which was written by AusAID and guided by 10 business and political leaders from across the region, will be launched today in Vanuatu by the parliamentary secretaries for the Pacific, Duncan Kerr, and international development assistance, Bob McMullan. It says smaller economies are stagnating and economic growth across the region last year was less than 4 per cent of GDP - almost half the rate for developing countries. But the future outlook is "positive" and includes expected growth this year of 4.5 per cent.

The Government will use the report to support development in the Pacific states - a commitment outlined earlier this month in its Port Moresby Declaration. Mr Kerr said the report was grounds for "cautious optimism" and showed improvements were possible.

The report says five states have developed a tourism industry - Fiji, Samoa, Cook Islands, Vanuatu and Palau - and two have benefited from the high prices of oil, copper and gold - Papua New Guinea and East Timor.

REPORT: SMH: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/30/1206850709162.html>: AUSAID [http://www.usaid.gov.au/publications/pubout.cfm?ID=3099\\_164\\_7831\\_8231\\_8369&Type=](http://www.usaid.gov.au/publications/pubout.cfm?ID=3099_164_7831_8231_8369&Type=)

### **CANBERRA TO GO CARBON-NEUTRAL?**

The Switch to Green Expo at the National Convention Centre on April 4/5 offered Canberrans practical steps to reduce carbon emissions at home and at work - with an aim to build support for moves towards a carbon neutral capital.

“The Switch to Green Expo will help Canberrans have ‘an earth hour’ every day of the year through a range of energy-saving initiatives,” said Expo organiser Russell Rollason, of the United Nations Association (ACT).

Co-hosted by United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA), the ACT Government, Canberra Business Council, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the Conservation Council, the exhibition included practical workshops run over the two days.

Expo highlights included:

Making your home a Green Home with tips from Australian Conservation Foundation

Get free advice on retrofitting your home for low energy use with architect Derek Wrigley

See how you can cut emissions with Greenchoice electricity with ActewAGL

Measure your carbon footprint with the ACT Home Energy Advice Team (HEAT)

See what schools are doing to become sustainable in the Aussie program

Find out how Canberra can ‘weather the change’

See how Canberra suburbs are planning to “solarise” with SEE-Change

Meet a Carbon Cop! - 15 minute sessions which help identify the no-cost, low-cost actions to reduce carbon emissions by 24 per cent in 24 hours.

ActewAGL Chief Executive Officer John Mackay said, “We’re thrilled to be part of the expo and communicate the benefits of Greenchoice to help people reduce their environmental footprint.

“Greenchoice invests in renewable energy generation from sources like mini-hydro, wind power or biomass, allowing ActewAGL to purchase a certain amount of renewable energy on behalf of the customer that otherwise would have been sourced from fossil fuels.”

DETAILS: [www.switchtogreen.unaa.org.au](http://www.switchtogreen.unaa.org.au)

### **LOOKING FOR CORRIDORS OF SURVIVAL**

Symposium 2008 *Corridors for Survival in a Changing World*, organised by the National Parks Association of the ACT, will run from May 9/10 at the Discovery Centre, CSIRO, Canberra. The symposium will discuss possible climate change effects on the region, including what species could be under threat and how fauna and flora might adapt.

It is hoped speakers will include Christine Goonrey, Jon Stanhope, Graeme Worboys (Alps to Atherton), Janette Lindesay, Phil Zylstra (Bushfire), Rod Atkins (Enhancing Connectivity Through Co-Operation Across Borders In The Australian Alps – Building Resilience For An Uncertain Future), Martin Worthy (The role of bushfire on landscape evolution in the Australian Alps) and Brett McNamara.

On the second day, speakers are expected to include Trish Harrup (Climate change – local impacts), Michael Doherty (Bushfire), Sarah Sharp (Possible conservation responses to challenges to the biodiversity in the ACT), Adrian Manning (Mulligans Flat/Goorooyaroo Woodlands Experiment) and Maxine Cooper (Global Warming, Fires and the Montane Forests of South-Eastern). DETAILS: Kevin McCue on 02 6251 1291; [kmccue@grapevine.com.au](mailto:kmccue@grapevine.com.au); <http://www.npaact.org.au>; [NPAACT](http://www.npaact.org.au).

## **C. PEACE & SECURITY**

### **AFGHANISTAN TOPS TALKS AS BAN MEETS NATO**

Afghanistan was a key feature of discussions between Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) during a three-day meeting in Bucharest (2/4/08).

Mr Ban met with NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Kai Eide also attended.

Kosovo and cooperation between the UN and NATO were also discussed. Afghanistan and Kosovo, an expanded UN role in Iraq and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were also on the agenda when Mr Ban met with the Romanian Prime Minister, Calin Popescu Tariceanu. Mr Ban said he appreciated Romania's contributions to UN peacekeeping operations – from Kosovo to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – as well as its voluntary funding to 15 UN agencies, funds and programs.

### **FRANCE PLEDGES 1,000 TROOPS FOR AFGHANISTAN**

France pledged on Wednesday to send up to 1,000 troops to Afghanistan in a move that will avert a Canadian threat to pull its contingent out of NATO's war in the violent south, the alliance said.

President Nicolas Sarkozy's offer of a battalion - which French military sources put at between 800 and 1,000 soldiers - comes as Paris prepares a possible return to NATO's military command next year after more than four decades of absence, Reuters reported.

"I can confirm the French Government has offered a substantial military contribution to operations in Afghanistan," a NATO spokesman said after the first session of a three-day summit of the 26-nation defence alliance in Bucharest.

He said the battalion would go to east Afghanistan, allowing U.S. troops stationed there to be sent to reinforce a 2,500-strong Canadian contingent in the south, now due to stay until 2011.  
REPORT: <http://www.reuters.com/article/politicsNews/idUSL0218684120080402>

### **NATO BACKS US MISSILE PLAN IN EUROPE**

NATO countries have agreed to back US plans to site a missile defence system in Europe, the BBC reported (4/4/08). Member states, meeting in Romania, are expected to endorse a communiqué backing the plan to position missile defence bases in the Czech Republic and Poland, US officials said.

Albania and Croatia were invited to join the 26-member alliance but Georgia and Ukraine will not be put immediately on a path to membership. Macedonia was told it must solve a dispute with Greece before joining.  
REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7328915.stm>

### **RUDD SETS OUT AUSTRALIA'S POSITION ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's overseas tour is creating a number of opportunities for him to present his government's policy and plans for Australia in relation to international relations.

In America, his addresses included those given to the Brookings Institution and the US Chamber of Commerce in Washington. They covered Australia's renewed engagement with the UN, views on areas of conflict such as Afghanistan and Iraq, climate change and the global economy.  
SPEECHES: [http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech\\_0157.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0157.cfm)

Other destinations the prime minister is visiting include London, Beijing, Brussels, Bucharest and southern China. A visit to Japan has been organised for June.

### **AUSTRALIA 'PLANS INCREASING UN INVOLVEMENT'**

Speaking at Washington's Brookings Institution, he told the audience that in his view the United States was an overwhelming force for good in the world. The US had used its political, military and economic power to provide the strategic ballast necessary to underpin the post-war global order, he said, adding that he was committed to deepening Australia's strategic engagement with the US.

Mr Rudd went on to say that Australia would also undertake an increasing engagement with the United Nations.

"The United Nations and the UN Charter are central to a global rules-based order," he said. "Australia is a foundation member of the UN. We are proud of the role we played in its establishment, particularly the part we played in the drafting committee for the UN Charter.

"We are also proud of the part we have played in UN Peacekeeping Operations over the years. Today we have people serving in UN-led or UN approved peacekeeping operations around the world in Sudan, Sinai, Solomon Islands and East Timor. We are currently the 12<sup>th</sup>-largest financial contributor to the UN's peacekeeping operations."

Australia would, in 2012, be seeking a seat on the UN Security Council for the 2013-2014 term. He said he told Mr Ban that Australia was ready to make a strong contribution to reforming the United Nations to make it more effective.

"In this, the role of the United States is also critical," he said. "Just as the United States drove the establishment of key international organisations, reforming those same institutions will require active US engagement. It is the same for the WTO (World Trade Organisation).

"US leadership will be crucial to getting a breakthrough so that we can get an ambitious outcome to the Doha Round of talks this year.

"The IMF has a real opportunity to play a leading role in the response to the current financial crisis. The World Bank, like the UN, would benefit from reform and I support the reform proposals currently being advanced by Bob Zoellick."

### **'WE LOOK TO CHINA TO MAKE A STRONG CONTRIBUTION'**

Mr Rudd said that in a political and foreign policy system as large and as complex as China's, there could be a potentially useful framework to start bringing together world views, he said, outlining a possible course of practical action. (See speech for details).

"In short, we look to China to make a strong contribution to strengthening the global and regional rules-based order ... There is nothing pre-determined about US-China conflict in the future. We decide the future by our actions today. And we need to give ourselves the best chance to choose the best future.

"We need to have: strong regional and global institutions; a China that is positively engaged in those institutions as a "responsible stakeholder" contributing to a "harmonious" global and regional order; and continued good management of China-US relations by both sides.

"For Australia, the single core question of whether ours will be a Pacific century rests on the long-term management of this most critical relationship.

"Our predecessors in 1944/45 faced great challenges in building an international order out of the ruins of the last global war. But out of their actions arose a stable international order built on the United Nations, Bretton Woods institutions and the continued strategic ballast provided by the United States.

"That order has delivered remarkable prosperity and stability for more than half a century," he said. "Our mission for the century ahead must be to enhance that stability and prosperity by meeting the challenges that lie now ahead head on. Rather than pretending these challenges might go away. Australia stands ready to assist in dealing with these great challenges of the future."

## NORTH ASIA

### **CHINA INCREASES OFFENSIVE AGAINST DALAI LAMA**

China has taken its offensive against the Dalai Lama to new heights, claiming it has uncovered a Tibetan guerilla ring that not only staged the deadly March 14 riot in Lhasa but was preparing suicide attacks before the Olympic Games at the behest of the exiled Tibetan leader, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (3/4/08).

Beijing has accused the Dalai Lama of orchestrating the protests, which began peacefully in Lhasa on March 10 before degenerating into violence on March 14, but has been under international pressure to back up its claims.

A spokesman for the Dalai Lama dismissed the allegations and reiterated that he was committed to non-violence. The president of the Tibetan Youth Congress, Tsewang Rigzin, also rejected claims the group supported violence.

Journalists and other observers have been ejected from Tibet and other Tibetan areas of western China where there have been widespread demonstrations in support of the Lhasa protests.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/04/02/1206851012042.html>

*SEE ALSO HUMAN RIGHTS PAGE.*

### **UN ENVOY: MAOIST ARMY AND WEAPONS MUST STAY IN CANTONMENTS**

The top UN official in Nepal vowed that the world body would play its part to try to ensure that Maoist army personnel and weapons were contained to the agreed cantonments during the current election campaign for the Constituent Assembly (28/3/08).

Ian Martin, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and the head of the UN Mission in Nepal ([UNMIN](#)), met with the country's independent Election Commission in Kathmandu, the capital, to discuss the effective monitoring of the cantonments through the Joint Monitoring and Coordination Committee.

Mr Martin told election commissioners that the mission had made it clear to the leadership of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) that it was a breach of the Agreement on the Monitoring of the Management of Arms and Armies for personnel and/or weapons from Maoist army cantonments to be present at meetings outside the cantonments, including for the purpose of providing leadership security.

While UNMIN recognised the importance of adequate security arrangements for leaders and candidates of all parties, special security arrangements for the Maoist leadership were agreed upon in a signed understanding between the government and the Maoists.

Nepalese voters go to the polls on April 10 to elect members of the Constituent Assembly, which is to draft a new constitution for Nepal. The polls, which have been delayed several times because of political violence, are part of a democratisation process following the end of the decade-long civil war when the government and Maoists signed a peace accord in 2006.

### **NORTH AND SOUTH CONTINUE WORD SPAT**

North Korea continued its war of words against the new South Korean government this weekend, threatening to respond to war mongering by reducing the South to "ashes" at the slightest indication of an attack. Relations between the two Koreas have soured significantly since South

Korea's new president unveiled a more hardline approach against the North last week. [The New York Times](#) (31/3/08).

## SOUTH-EAST ASIA/PACIFIC

### **TIMOR-LESTE: UN AND PARTNERS APPEAL FOR \$33.5M**

The United Nations and non-governmental organisations working in Timor-Leste are seeking \$33.5 million to help the country's most vulnerable, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and those most at risk from natural disasters (31/3/08).

Finn Reske-Nielsen, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Timor-Leste, said that funds raised will complement those already committed by the government toward projects outlined in the Transitional Strategy and Appeal.

"The Government of Timor-Leste has committed \$15 million in 2008 to address IDP issues," he said. "These financial resources constitute a significant and increased commitment of the Government towards these issues. However, further donor support to the Government's efforts will be valuable to help meet its shortfall."

The funds will support continued emergency assistance in IDP camps, the government's National Recovery Strategy and strengthen the country's ability to manage risk and impact from natural disasters.

While humanitarian assistance in the IDP camps continued to be critical, the primary focus of the government and its partners was the early recovery initiatives to facilitate the return and/or resettlement of those who have been displaced.

Mr Reske-Nielsen said that ongoing humanitarian problems that stemmed from the 2006 crisis were complex and multi-dimensional with social, economic and political roots. The crisis, attributed in part to differences between Timor-Leste's eastern and western regions, began in April with the firing of 600 striking soldiers, a third of the overall armed forces. Ensuing violence claimed at least 37 lives and drove 155,000 people, or about 15 per cent of the total population, from their homes. The Security Council created the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) in August 2006 to help restore stability.

There was no simple or short-term solution, and the experience of national and international organisations, along with the government, showed that continued support to ongoing humanitarian response and recovery efforts was vital to reach a sustainable resolution to the crisis, he said.

### **AUSTRALIAN MILITARY INTERVENTION AND THE FIJI 2006 COUP**

In November 2006 the Australian Blackhawk helicopter crash off Kadavu (Fiji) drew attention to the fact that SAS members were on the Kanimbla in Fiji waters prior to the 2006 coup. A new report - by the Fiji Human Rights Commission which is an active supporter of the current Fiji interim administration - argues that Australia's intervention was illegal. It implies that Australia's actions (sending warships, and providing military support for the Fiji police, headed at the time by an Australian Federal Police officer) were provocative. A Medical Association for Prevention of War report asks what was the effect of Australia's intervention? REPORT: <http://www.mapw.org.au/download/australian-military-intervention-and-fiji-2006-coup>

## MIDDLE EAST

### **LASTING MIDEAST PEACE 'HINGES' ON RESOLVING ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT: BAN**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed that peace and progress in the Middle East, "hinges on a just and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict" (31/3/08). He pledged UN support.

The Peace Initiative put forward by the League of Arab States "remains a key element in our efforts to achieve peace," he said, in a [message](#) delivered by Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe to the group's summit in Damascus at the weekend.

"Your engagement is particularly crucial for the fragile political process currently underway between President [Mahmoud] Abbas and Prime Minister [Ehud] Olmert," Mr Ban stressed, adding that while the two leaders expressed their desire to reach an agreement by the end of this year, "the path to peace remains littered with daunting challenges."

Mr Ban called for a more positive strategy for Gaza and encouraged all Arab countries to act responsibly and exercise whatever influence they had to support a cessation of violence in and around Gaza.

Regarding Lebanon, where the presidency has been vacant for more than four months, he said that this situation was no longer sustainable. "All Lebanese leaders should put the interests of their country and people first and bring the country away from the brink," he stated, calling on everyone to rally behind and work for the implementation of the Arab League initiative.

There had been "significant progress" in the establishment of the Special Tribunal to try those responsible for the death of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005, noting that the court's work was an important step toward ending impunity and contribute to a just and lasting peace in the country.

"The challenges ahead are substantial, but they are not insurmountable," he said, calling for a strong and strategic partnership between the UN and the Arab League. He envisaged "one that delivers on the security, development and human rights aspirations of the Arab people."

### **HAMAS POLICY A FAILURE - EVANS**

Former Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans has called for the international community to engage with the Islamist regime Hamas, AAP reported (31/3/08).

The militant Hamas took full control of the Gaza Strip in June last year, and since then, the region has been subject to increasingly harsh sanctions. Hamas' control of Gaza has split the Palestinian territory in two with the Palestinian Authority retaining control of the West Bank.

Since 2000 Mr Evans has been the president of the Belgium based International Crisis Group. Writing in the *Christian Science Monitor* last week, Mr Evans says the sanctions policy has left the peace process between Israel and Palestine "in tatters" and only reinforced Hamas' power.

"The logic behind the policy was that by putting pressure on Hamas, they could prevent rocket launches into Israel," Mr Evans wrote. "This would demonstrate to the Palestinian people that Hamas could not deliver and ought not be trusted."

"The hope was that the West Bank, buoyed by economic growth, a loosening of Israeli security measures, not to mention a revived peace process, would serve as an attractive counter model. "But the theory has not delivered on any of these counts." Mr Evans wrote "it's time to stop digging this hole".

### **ARAB MEETING SEES DISAGREEMENT OVER LEBANON**

The Arab League's meeting on Saturday took place under the looming shadow of fierce disagreements over Lebanon between Syria and its supporters and the pro-Western

governments of Egypt and others. Bitter regional political infighting over the issue, argues The Economist, will do little to solve the political crisis in Lebanon. [The Economist](#) (29/3/08).

### **CRIMINAL NETWORK 'KILLED LEBANESE PM', SAYS REPORT**

Evidence shows that a criminal network was responsible for the massive car bombing that killed the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 22 others in Beirut in February 2005, the International Independent Investigation Commission (IIIC) says in a new report to the UN Security Council (28/3/08).

UN spokesperson Michele Montas said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had submitted the latest report of the IIIC, which is headed by Daniel Bellemare, to the 15 council members.

In that report the IIIC – which was set up by the Security Council – said it has evidence that a network of individuals acted in concert to carry out the assassination of Mr Hariri and that this same network, or parts of it, was linked to other cases that fell within the commission's mandate.

Mr Ban and the UN are taking steps to set up the Special Tribunal for Lebanon to try those responsible for Mr Hariri's death. A headquarters agreement has been signed with the Netherlands, a prosecutor and a registrar has been appointed, and a management committee established. Financial contributions and pledges have also come from several UN member states. The Special Tribunal will determine whether other political killings in Lebanon since October 2004 were connected to the assassination of Mr Hariri and could be dealt with by the tribunal.

### **TRILATERAL STRATEGIC DIALOGUE AND ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY**

One year after the first trilateral strategic dialogue (TSD) between Australian, Japan and the United States was held at a ministerial level, a group of eminent international scholars gathered in Canberra to explore the future of the TSD, and the security architectures of the region (31/3/08).

The workshop, organised by the ANU, is part of the university's engagement in the International Alliance of Research Universities. Academics from partner universities (Universities of Copenhagen, Cambridge, California - Berkley, Oxford, Peking, Tokyo, ETH Zurich, the National University of Singapore and Yale University) attended, with colleagues from other Australian and regional universities. DETAILS: ANU Media Office on 02 6125 5001.

## **D. HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **BEIJING JAILS HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST**

A Beijing court sentenced human rights activist Hu Jia to three and a half years' jail and one year's denial of political rights on charges of "inciting subversion to state power", the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) reported (3/4/08).

Mr Hu, 35, was arrested on December 27, 2007, and formally charged on January 29, 2008, 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 United States, that were critical of Chinese authorities in relation to democracy and human rights from August 2006 to October 2007. Mr Hu was under house arrest at the time.

More than a hundred journalists and citizens gathered outside the court but were not allowed inside. The court said that Hu maliciously defamed the power of the state and the Communist system in China.

Although his wife, blogger Zeng Jinyan, said that Mr Hu would not want to appeal, Mr Hu's lawyer, Li Fang-Ping, said that Mr Hu had not yet ruled out an appeal. Ms Zeng, who along with their baby daughter, has been under house arrest since Mr Hu's arrest, said her husband had lost more than 600 days of freedom since his house arrest.

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. Freedom of speech is enshrined in Chapter Two, Article 35, which states, 'Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration.'

The jail sentence imposed on Mr Hu, based on opaque charges, again highlighted that China's authorities intended to stamp out and silence dissent regardless of their commitments to do otherwise ahead of the Beijing Olympic Games in August, IFJ Asia-Pacific Director Jacqueline Park said.

### **UN SYSTEM VOWS TO ENSURE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

More than 20 UN departments, agencies, programs, and funds have pledged their support to implementing a landmark treaty on the human rights of persons with disabilities, which opened for signature ago (30/3/08).

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted by the General Assembly in December 2006 along with its Optional Protocol, is only three ratifications short of the 20 needed to enter into force and become an internationally legally binding document.

The Inter-Agency Support Group for the Convention has vowed to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity as laid out in the convention.

"The statement demonstrates our collective commitment to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities through their full inclusion in the work of the United Nations system," said UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Sha Zukang.

Through the newly-formed group, the UN system will support measures both in countries that are party to the convention and within the Organisation itself to implement the treaty's provisions and ensure the rights of the world's 650 million persons with disabilities.

Support will focus on six main areas: policies to support the purpose and objectives of the convention; programs including international cooperation; capacity-building of member states, civil society, and the UN system; research and access to knowledge on disabilities; accessibility; and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## **SOUTH AMERICA**

### **JAMAICA'S POOR AT MERCY OF CRIMINAL GANGS**

Jamaica's poor have been abandoned by the government and left to the mercy of violent criminal gangs, Amnesty International says in a new report, according to the BBC (1/4/08).

The human rights group said inner-city Jamaicans were being "held hostage" in the battle between gangs and the state. Jamaican authorities had stigmatised and "wilfully neglected" inner-city communities and Jamaica had one of the region's highest murder rates, with 1,500 homicides in 2007 and 272 police killings.

"Criminal gangs... keep thousands of people living in constant fear," Amnesty's Fernanda Doz Costa said. "Entire populations are shut down by barricades and unable to leave their homes after 5pm. Children don't go out to school and adults don't go to work because transport is suspended."

The human rights group urged Jamaican authorities to address the underlying causes of what it said was a "human rights crisis". It said the government should act to reduce murder rates, introduce human-rights based policing and reform the judicial system.

REPORT: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/gangs-and-police-cripple-jamaicas-inner-cities-20080401>

### **COLOMBIA: DEATH THREATS DRIVE THOUSANDS FROM HOMES**

In Colombia, fighting and threats continue to force thousands of families to flee their homes every year, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said (3/4/08). In 2007 alone, the ICRC provided food and household items to more than 66,000 displaced persons – a six per cent increase compared with 2006.

"While mass displacement has subsided in recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of families leaving their homes because of the conflict," said Barbara Hintermann, the ICRC's head of delegation in Colombia. Presenting the organisation's 2007 activity report in Bogotá, she said, "The steady stream of families fleeing their land and settling in cities goes almost unnoticed. The plight of those who have lost everything because of the armed conflict is rarely discussed in public."

Children are particularly hard hit by this crisis: more than half the displaced people receiving ICRC support last year were under 18. Fifty-eight per cent of the displaced said they left their homes after receiving death threats, while 11 per cent said they had been put under pressure to cooperate with weapon bearers. Nine per cent stated that they had been threatened with forced recruitment into an armed group, and five per cent fled following armed clashes near their homes.

In 2007, the ICRC documented nearly 1,700 alleged violations of international humanitarian law in Colombia, including summary executions, forced disappearances and hostage-taking. It helped nearly 2,500 people who had received threats to move to safer areas – a 40 per cent increase over 2006.

DETAILS: [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org) ; Sydney Support Office to the Regional Delegation for the Pacific, Pauline Wall, Communications Officer, (61 2) 9388 9039/Mobile (61 2) 418 485 120.

### **SOUTH EAST ASIA/PACIFIC**

#### **FORTY PROTESTERS CONVICTED IN SECRET MYANMAR TRIALS: AMNESTY**

At least 40 protesters in Myanmar, including seven Buddhist monks, have been sentenced to prison after secret trials over last year's pro-democracy marches, Amnesty International said (2/4/08).

In September, Buddhist monks spearheaded the biggest anti-government protests in Yangon in nearly 20 years, but the military regime violently suppressed the movement by opening fire on crowds and beating people in the streets.

Officially, more than 3,000 people were arrested during the crackdown. The junta says the vast majority have been released.

But Amnesty said in a statement that at least 700 were still behind bars, and at least 40 of them have been sentenced to prison after secret trials. Its research found protesters had been convicted "for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly."

The United Nations estimated that at least 31 people were killed during the crackdown. In addition to the 700 jailed protesters, Myanmar has another 1,150 political prisoners held prior to the monks' marches in September.

REPORT: <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5i4eBQsLDV7G8X32Y8tSRgxC7Ck9w>

## **CALL TO REJECT BURMA CONSTITUTION**

Burma's opposition National League for Democracy has urged voters to reject the new army-backed constitution in a referendum next month, the BBC reported (2/4/080).

The country's military leaders say the proposed constitution is part of a process elections in 2010. The NLD said the planned constitution, which bars its leader Aung San Suu Kyi from key political posts, would not guarantee human rights or democracy.

Burma has not had a constitution since 1988 when the current junta took power. The NLD statement said that the proposed constitution "cannot give any guarantee for democracy and human rights, which are strongly needed by the people. It is not in accord with the basic democratic principle that the sovereign power of the state is derived from the people," the NLD said.

Although the text of the draft constitution has not been publicly released, news agencies say leaked copies show that it enshrines the military's dominant role in politics beyond the multiparty elections slated for 2010. The constitution would also bar the NLD's leader, Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, from the presidency or a seat in the legislature because she married a British man. REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7326919.stm>

## **HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL NEARS END OF SESSION**

Having initiated the first periodic review of the human rights performance of all states and established rapporteurs on ground-breaking new rights topics, the seventh session of the United Nations Human Rights Council finished the bulk of its work in Geneva (28/3/08).

The session, begun on March 3, will end hearing statements from delegations one day next week and adopt its report to the General Assembly.

The session inaugurated the first Universal Periodic Review, under which all UN member states - , at the rate of 48 a year - will be examined to assess whether they have fulfilled their human rights obligation.

In addition, 11 special rapporteurs were nominated, including an independent expert with a new mandate to cover rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The 47-member council elected 18 members of its advisory committee, which will hold its first session from August 4/15. The committee's experts will function as a think-tank for the council, which was created in 2006 to replace the Human Rights Commission as part of ongoing UN reform. At its eighth session, over June 2/13, the council will examine the first report of its working group on the Universal Periodic Review, which will start work on individual countries on April 7.

## **POVERTY IS ON THE RUN BUT WE MUST KEEP CHASING: TED TURNER**

UN Foundation chairman Ted Turner emphasised making the eight [Millennium Development Goals](#) a priority in order to achieve them by the 2015 deadline when he addressed the UN General Assembly this week. He said, "Poverty is on the run and we just need to keep chasing it down."

The MDGs focussed on shared core issues of poverty, children's health, empowerment of women and girls, sustainable environment, disease and global development.

The foundation says, "We're working towards them all but we believe the eighth MDG calling for a Global Partnership for Development is probably the most important. It reflects the fact that the fates of all people and nations are linked. Unless we can help the world's poor create a better life, no one's prosperity can be secure."

The foundation announced "[our newest initiative](#) with two leading faith-based organisations to combat malaria. The People of the United Methodist Church (UMC) and Lutheran World Relief (LWR) have committed to raising \$200 million to combat this disease that kills more than one

million people a year and is the leading cause of death for children in Africa.”

This was an opportunity for the UN Foundation to continue its work to prevent the spread of malaria and other deadly diseases through campaigns like Nothing But Nets and the Measles Initiative. [Check out the MDG's](#)

Speaking at the Brookings Institution while in the US, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said of the Millennium Development Goals, “We are already at the half-way point on the time line established in 2000 for the MDGs. Progress has been mixed at best. We need to make sure that all our efforts are delivering results ... We want to work at a practical level with our global and regional partners to deliver real progress against these goals on which we all solemnly agreed back in 2000.”

## AUSTRALIA

### **AFP ‘STILL WORKING ON HANEEF CASE’**

Nine federal police staff members are still working full-time on the Mohamed Haneef case as the investigation of the Indian doctor - and the bill to taxpayers - keep ticking over, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (4/4/08).

The cost of the investigation into Dr Haneef's alleged links to a British terrorist cell is already approaching \$8 million, even though charges against the former registrar at Gold Coast Hospital were dropped more than eight months ago and an independent inquiry has been initiated into what went wrong.

That inquiry is expected to start this month, and it emerged yesterday that the man heading it, John Clarke, QC, has rebuffed entreaties from Dr Haneef's lawyers to widen his powers, which do not allow him to subpoena witnesses or documents.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/04/03/1206851105553.html>

### **BROKEN PROMISE WILL LEAD TO LEGAL AID CUTS**

Aboriginal legal aid services were preparing to cut services after the Federal Government reneged on an election promise to increase their funding for the first time in 12 years, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (31/3/08).

In NSW and the ACT, a hotline for Aboriginal people in police custody could be gone by June, as could domestic violence counsellors and representation at Supreme Court bail hearings and parole board hearings, said Trevor Christian, the director of the NSW/ACT Aboriginal Legal Aid Service.

The hotline receives between 200 and 300 calls a week and was a recommendation of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody. NSW requires police to call it whenever an Indigenous person is arrested.

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/broken-promise-will-lead-to-legal-aid-cuts/2008/03/30/1206850709195.html>

### **CHILDREN IN CARE REPORT WELCOMED**

Long-term campaigner for the recognition of the harm done to children in care, Senator Andrew Murray, has welcomed the results of a three-year long inquiry by former Supreme Court Justice Ted Mullighan into the abuse of children in state care in South Australia (1/4/08).

“The South Australian Mullighan report is yet another that uncovers the vile crime of sexual assault and abuse of so many vulnerable children in care. This report joins a long list of international national and state-based reports over many years that address the harm done to children in care.

“Hopefully this latest report and its recommendations will not only motivate and energise the South Australian Government on these matters, but the Federal Government as well.

“The previous Howard government failed because it deferred to the States and Territories on constitutional grounds. That enabled them to avoid taking responsibility. Even the vital recommendation for the establishment of a national commission for children and young people to drive a national reform agenda for child protection was not agreed to,” he said.

“The Rudd government has shown itself willing and able to use COAG as a mechanism for shared responsibility for national problems. The Federal Government now has the wake-up call it needs to make sure that a national approach is adopted to tackle the assault and abuse of children.

“The 2005 Senate Community Affairs Report, *Protecting Vulnerable Children: A National Challenge* made 18 unanimous recommendations to address a problem of such a scale that the states can no longer be expected to handle on their own,” he said.

DETAILS: Senator Murray on 0419 958 038.

### **10 POINT PLAN TO IMPROVE NT INTERVENTION**

Modifying the Northern Territory intervention legislation to maximise protection of children from abuse without racially discriminating against Indigenous people is one of the major elements of a 10 point plan outlined in the Social Justice Report 2007 officially launched in Sydney on Monday.

The report, produced annually by HREOC through the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, considers the impact of government activity on the exercise and enjoyment of Indigenous people’s human rights.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, said the plan involved proposed changes to the NT intervention legislation so that it maximised protection of children and families, while respecting the human rights of Indigenous people and treating them with dignity.

“In putting forth this plan, I note that the new Federal Government has emphasised the importance of ensuring that the NT intervention is consistent with Australia’s human rights obligations,” he said.

“But the fact is, 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 society,” he said.

“Over the last 18 months we’ve seen sustained media coverage of child abuse and family violence, but we’ve rarely seen or heard how Indigenous people and communities across Australia are taking positive steps to respond to this violence, abuse and neglect.

“I have provided 19 case studies in the Social Justice Report 2007 as evidence of what can be achieved in the fight against child abuse and family violence in Indigenous communities when there is true engagement with Indigenous people.

“Sometimes these steps were taken because communities felt a need to take action themselves and others developed through formal and informal partnerships with individual government agencies, non-government organisations, the courts or police.

“But most importantly, every single one of them is striving to make a lasting difference and they are initiatives led by Indigenous people,” he said.

The Social Justice Report 2007 also identifies a number of other specific concerns about the NT intervention such as: consistency of the income management regime with the rights to social security; privacy and non-discrimination; the consistency of the alcohol management regime with the right of non-discrimination; and the absence of effective participation of Indigenous peoples in decision making that affects them.

The Ten Point Action Plan for modifying the NT intervention, outlined in detail in the Social Justice Report 2007, includes:

- Action 1: Restore all rights to procedural fairness and external merits review under the NT intervention legislation.
- Action 2: Reinstate protections against racial discrimination in the operation of the NT intervention legislation.
- Action 3: Amend or remove the provisions that declare that the legislation constitutes a 'special measure'.
- Action 4: Reinstate protections against discrimination in the Northern Territory and Queensland.
- Action 5: Require consent to be obtained in the management of Indigenous property and amend the legislation to confirm the guarantee of just terms compensation.
- Action 6: Reinstate the CDEP program and review the operation of the income management scheme so that it is consistent with human rights.
- Action 7: Review the operation and effectiveness of the alcohol management schemes under the intervention legislation.
- Action 8: Ensure the effective participation of Indigenous peoples in all aspects of the intervention – Developing Community Partnership Agreements.
- Action 9: Set a timetable for the transition from an 'emergency' intervention to a community development plan; and
- Action 10: Ensure stringent monitoring and review processes.

REPORT: Social Justice Report 2007:

[www.humanrights.gov.au/social\\_justice/sj\\_report/sjreport07/](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/sj_report/sjreport07/)

### **NEED TO SIMPLIFY NATIVE TITLE SYSTEM TO UNDO GRIDLOCK**

The Australian native title system should be immediately reviewed and a national summit held to discuss ways to improve its operation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma said in the Native Title Report 2007, officially launched in Sydney (31/3/08).

Commissioner Calma is required to report to the Attorney - General annually on major changes and challenges in the Native Title system over the past year.

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 system does not seem to be effectively recognising and protecting native title," Mr Calma said. "We need to rethink the entire system with an open mind and focus on increasing the recognition of native title and strengthening its protection."

Mr Calma said the Native Title Act, and the systems set up under it, were essentially not fulfilling their objectives, which were to gain recognition and protection of native title for Indigenous people and, through this, to enable them to fully exercise and enjoy their human rights.

"It is vital to Indigenous people and their future that their rights and interests in country according to their traditional laws and customs are recognised. Recognition and protection of native title is critical to advancing reconciliation between Australia's past and present, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians," Mr Calma said.

He also expressed concern that recent changes to the native title system aimed at improving efficiencies had enjoyed some success but had not focussed on recognising and protecting Indigenous peoples' native title.

The Native Title Report 2007 found that Indigenous people around the country were using their land and culture to pursue economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes.

The Report profiles successful examples of sustainable development such as the Western Arnhem Land Fire Abatement (WALFA) project, which uses traditional fire burning practices to reduce carbon emissions while generating income for local communities.

Mr Calma said Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) were another important tool of the native title system.

"The ILUAs and other aspects of the system should be examined closely by government to see how they can maximise the social, economic and native title outcomes for Indigenous Australians."

REPORT: Native Title Report 2007: [www.humanrights.gov.au/social\\_justice/nt\\_report/](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/nt_report/)

### **INDIGENOUS TEST SCORE GAPS NARROWEST IN EARLY YEARS**

Test score gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are narrowest in the early years, according to new research from the Australian National University, newly released (31/3/08).

The research, by ANU economists Dr Andrew Leigh and Dr Xiaodong Gong, used data from the *Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children* to look at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous test score gap at ages 4-5.

The study focussed on two cognitive tests. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test is a test of English vocabulary, in which children must choose the picture that best matches a word given to them verbally by the examiner. The 'Who Am I?' test is a battery of ten drawing and writing exercises, in which children are required to complete exercises ranging in complexity from copying a circle to writing a sentence.

"On these tests, the Indigenous/non-Indigenous test score gap among pre-schoolers is about one year. In other words, the typical Indigenous 5 year old performs at about the same level as the typical non-Indigenous 4 year old", said Dr Leigh. "This gap may sound large, but it is substantially smaller than the gap found in most studies of the Indigenous/non-Indigenous test score gap among older children."

The study, *Estimating Cognitive Gaps Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians*, is forthcoming in the journal *Education Economics*: <http://econrsss.anu.edu.au/~aleigh/>  
DETAILS: Dr Andrew Leigh on 02 6125 1374 or 0431 706 600.

### **OMBUDSMAN'S REPORT MISSES 'REFUGEES' THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS OF DEBT'**

In the preamble to a report from the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office, it is stated that its role is to report on any law "that was unjust, oppressive or improperly discriminatory" writes Pamela Carr, Campaign Coordinator, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre ASRC.

The report however did not describe the imposition of debts of hundreds of thousands of dollars on refugees when detention debts were imposed on people unlawfully, she said. Instead it recommended that DIAC inform people in a timely manner of their debts and recommends clearer language. She says of 3,568 debts raised in the last financial year only 10 were waived (Section 1.3).

"Another 3,571 were "written off", however, as the Ombudsman's report makes clear – these 'written off' debts can be reinstated at any time," she says. "The language is ambiguous and most

people think that 'written off' means the same as 'waived'. DIAC do not inform people of the difference. (See Section 3.9 and Page 18) ... The Ombudsman advises that DIAC should institute a waiver process for people unlawfully detained (2.16). Surely people unlawfully detained in the detention centres should not have a debt imposed in the first place.

"The ASRC, like many other agencies, knows of cases of severe hardship and stress imposed on impoverished refugees as they struggle out of years of detention in Australia's awful camps," she said. REPORT:

[http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/commonwealth/publish.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/reports\\_2008\\_02/\\$FILE/reports\\_2008\\_02.pdf](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/commonwealth/publish.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/reports_2008_02/$FILE/reports_2008_02.pdf)

DETAILS: Pamela Curr on 0417517075/03 93266066; [www.asrc.org.au](http://www.asrc.org.au)

### **REFUGEE GETS UNAFFORDABLE LOAN**

One of Australia's biggest banks has admitted giving unaffordable personal loans to Sudanese refugees, including some with no job, no English and no concept of finance. The bank told the ABC's *Four Corners* it had introduced a new affordability policy after an internal inquiry into the 18 loans to families in south-eastern Melbourne (31/3/08).

The bank gave Deng Gatluak a \$20,000 car loan, even though he did not speak the language, was unemployed and had no idea of how such a loan worked. His wife, who still speaks virtually no English and had no assets, was made the guarantor on the loan. The repayments left the family of nine with next to nothing to live on.

REPORT: <http://www2b.abc.net.au/tmb/Client/TopicList.aspx?b=21&dm=1>

## **NORTH ASIA**

### **STONED TO DEATH FOR COMMITTING ADULTERY**

A man and a woman have reportedly been stoned to death by the Taliban after being found guilty of adultery by a tribal court in Pakistan's border region, the Sydney Morning Herald reports (3/4/08).

The stoning was carried out in a tribal area on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan where the Taliban has a strong presence, Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* reported. The killings are the first recorded incident of death by stoning by the militants, who usually put accused before firing squads, the newspaper stated.

Report: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/04/03/1206851052700.html>

### **LATEST 'CORRUPT REGIME TO DISAPPOINT AFGHAN PEOPLE'**

An elected member of Afghanistan's Parliament, Malalai Joya, 29, turned heads with her blunt assessment of many colleagues, calling them warlords and drug czars who were unfit to serve. Suspended last year for her remarks, Joya is still talking about her country's problems, even in the face of harsh criticism and death threats, the Providence Journal, Rhode Island, reported (19/3/08).

At Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies, she told an audience that the US-backed government that replaced the Taliban was merely the latest corrupt regime to disappoint and impoverish the Afghan people.

Rather than bring hope and change, the new government had left Afghanistan a place where medical care was scarce, where violence against women flourished, where women had a life expectancy of 44, and where girls were treated like currency and sold.

She said corrupt officials stole elections with death threats, journalists were jailed for questioning the government, opium cultivation had skyrocketed, the Taliban continued to rule some areas with Islamic law, and billions of dollars in aid had failed to make its way to the Afghan people, leaving more than 60 per cent living below the poverty line.

"Every kind of atrocity has been committed" in the name of ousting the Taliban and establishing democracy, she said during a 15-minute speech.

She proposed three steps that she said would solve Afghanistan's problems: remove the Northern Alliance that helped US and British forces to retake the country from the Taliban, persuade the international community and UN to stop countries sending arms to the Northern Alliance and the Taliban, and provide support for people who truly wanted a democratic country. Short of that, she said, the country's new constitution is "like a beautiful thing on the shelf of the warlord to deceive the world." Malalia Joya is scheduled to address the European Parliament in May. REPORT: [http://www.projo.com/news/content/AFGHAN\\_SPEAKER\\_03-19-08\\_QG9E9TJ\\_v99.380ead4.html](http://www.projo.com/news/content/AFGHAN_SPEAKER_03-19-08_QG9E9TJ_v99.380ead4.html) and <http://www.malalajoya.com/index1024.htm>

### **TAMPA BOY LIKELY SPELLING WHIZ**

An Afghan boy who was on the *Tampa* has just won third place in New Zealand's national spelling bee, *Crikey* reports.

In 2001 Abbas Nazari was on board a stricken fishing boat of asylum seekers when the *Tampa*, a Norwegian cargo ship rescued them and tried to take them to Australia. The Howard Government refused to let any of what it called "queue jumpers" on to Australian soil, but New Zealand offered asylum to around 150 of them, including Abbas and his family.

After learning English for only six years, Abbas, now 12, became the third best speller in New Zealand over the Easter weekend. He wants to be an astronomer when he grows up, "New Zealand is a nice place to live," he says, "the weather's good and you don't expect car bombs going off." (Courtesy *Crikey* and BARC, 27/3/08).

### **CLA FOCUSES ON CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

A hectic year for civil liberties issues as the Rudd Labor Government fired up a change agenda in and out of Parliament, was anticipated by Civil Liberties Australia this week.

CLA reported there had been a frank discussion with Attorney-General Rob McClelland concerning the need for a national debate on a charter of rights and responsibilities and that a debate was likely to start about mid-year with the release of a robust discussion paper.

CLA also reported that:

Liberal backbencher Petro Georgiou had moved to wind back excess terrorism powers given to security and police agencies, and appoint an independent reviewer of terrorism laws; Democrat Senator Andrew Bartlett tabled a private member's Bill seeking to clarify the protocols about Australia deciding to become involved in military interventions overseas, and trying to introduce a strong supervisory role for Parliament.

Democrat Senator Andrew Murray was appointed to review financial governance issues relating to how expenditure is presented to, and decided on, by Parliament, a "sleeper" review is likely to have far-reaching consequences".

Democrat Natasha Stott Despoja moved for a review of terror laws by the Senate's Legal and Constitutional Affairs committee and, in particular, a review of the Rudd Government's plans to beef up the Telecommunications Interception Act provisions; and

Greens Senator Bob Brown tabled a Bill to end the ban on NT legislation permitting euthanasia - a ban was imposed by the Federal Parliament over the NT Parliament a decade ago, raising issues of equal democratic rights for Australians as well as euthanasia rights. ([CLA's Euthanasia submission](#)). DETAILS: [secretary@cla.asn.au](mailto:secretary@cla.asn.au)

**AUSTRALIAN WOMAN FACING FIRING SQUAD** An Australian woman is facing a Vietnamese firing squad after an appeal court sentenced her to death for heroin trafficking last month, the London Guardian reported (19/3/08).

Jasmine Luong, 34, of Sydney has until early this month to appeal directly to the Vietnamese president for clemency.

She was jailed for life by a lower court on being convicted of attempting to smuggle 1.5kg of heroin on to a flight to Australia, but the prosecution appealed, and the appeal court in Ho Chi Minh City increased her sentence to the death penalty, according to the state-run newspaper, *Liberation Saigon*.

Vietnam has some of the world's harshest drugs laws. Possessing, trading or trafficking in more than 600g of heroin or 20kg of opium carries a sentence of life imprisonment or death. REPORT: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/mar/19/australia>

## **E. HEALTH & MEANS**

### **HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN BASRA AND BAGHDAD**

Almost one week of continuous fighting in Basra, Baghdad and other governorates had left hundreds of people dead and many more wounded, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported (1/4/08). While some areas in Baghdad and Basra remained tense, people began to move freely yesterday to stock up on food, water and other essential goods.

Hospitals have used up stocks of vital medical items and required further supplies to cope with the influx of wounded patients the ICRC reported. Access to water remained a matter of concern in certain areas.

Life-saving medical services had been affected by the fighting in Basra, Baghdad and elsewhere in the country.

'Several ambulances were hit in Basra and some were not allowed to reach injured persons in urgent need of medical care,' said Juan-Pedro Schaerer, head of the ICRC delegation for Iraq. 'It is the duty of the parties to the conflict to provide safe passage for ambulances and to spare the wounded and those taking care of them.'

The ICRC was about to deliver eight tonnes of medical supplies to four hospitals in Baghdad and to hand over a further six tonnes to the Department of Health in Kut for the Kut, Hilla and Najaf hospitals.

In recent days the ICRC has received several requests for emergency supplies from hospitals in Baghdad. On 30 March, the ICRC delivered to Imam Ali General Hospital in Sadr City and to Baghdad General Hospital three tonnes of supplies, including pharmaceuticals, dressings, sutures, anaesthetics, and other surgical consumables – enough to treat about 200 patients. In addition, the ICRC supplied Al Yarmouk Teaching Hospital, west of the capital, with enough suture modules to treat 200 patients.

A total of 700 family parcels, each containing a one-month supply of food, which had been provided for the Social Welfare Organisation by the ICRC before the recent fighting, have been distributed to needy families in Sadr City.

DETAILS: Dorothea Krimitsas, ICRC Geneva, on +41 22 730 25 90 or +41 79 251 93 18; Hicham Hassan, ICRC Iraq, on +962 777 399 614 or +962 6 552 39 94; website: [www.icrc.org](http://www.icrc.org) and Sydney Support Office on 61 2 9388 9039; fax 61 2 9388 9042; [sydney.sydney@icrc.org](mailto:sydney.sydney@icrc.org).

## **LIFETIME OF DEVOTION TO ETHIOPIAN OUTCASTS**

After a lifetime devoted to Ethiopia's social outcasts, the fistula women, Dr Catherine Hamlin is close to realising her dream to put a midwife in every village, reported the Sydney Morning Herald (29/3/08).

Dr Hamlin has been dubbed 'the new Mother Teresa of our age' and 'the angel of Ethiopia', but speak to her sister and there's a stifled giggle as memories come flooding back. "Let's just say she was not what you'd call a placid child," Ailsa Pottie says of their childhood in Ryde.

"She was full of mischief, always in strife and had plenty of ideas when it came to leading her five siblings astray. We are all terribly proud of her but when I remember what she got up to as a child, it does seem odd to think she's a Nobel Peace Prize nominee, doesn't it?"

Dr Hamlin, now 84, is not making much mischief these days. She's too busy putting the finishing touches to the Hamlin Midwifery College in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, a project she hopes will produce a midwife for every village in the impoverished nation, saving thousands of lives and fulfilling a dream she has harboured for 50 years. DETAILS: <http://www.fistulatrust.org/>

## G. MEDIA MATTERS

**AUSTRALIA:** The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) has called on the WA Attorney-General Jim McGinty to stand by his commitment to "sensible" shield laws that protect journalists acting in accordance with their code of ethics, Civil Liberties Australia reported.

In the past 12 months, five WA journalists have been threatened with three years jail and \$60,000 fines for refusing to reveal their sources at secret hearings held by the WA Corruption and Crime Commission.

The MEAA WA has lodged a detailed submission with Mr McGinty and Labor Member of the Legislative Council, Ken Travers, who chairs a parliamentary committee which oversees CCC activities. DETAILS: MEAA WA branch secretary Michael Sinclair-Jones on 0411 885 316.

**PHILIPPINES:** The Cebu Regional Trial Court (RTC) in the Philippines found a man guilty of the attempted murder of Cebu radio broadcaster Cirse 'Choy' Torrabla in June 2004, and according to the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP), he was sentenced to up to 12 years in jail. He had pleaded not guilty to a charge of shooting Torrabla several times while driving past the dyAR radio station in Cebu City. Torrabla was seriously injured. As many as 91 murders of journalists and media workers have been recorded by the NUJP in the past 20 years. Only four perpetrators have been convicted and only eight investigations are active. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

**PAKISTAN:** Pakistan's new Prime Minister, Yusuf Raza Gillani, is to end restrictions on the media by abolishing the amended Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance 2007 and to implement the Seventh Wage Award, according to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) issued a joint statement with the All Pakistan Newspapers Employees' Confederation (APNEC) on March 29 calling on the Prime Minister to appoint a joint committee of all media stakeholders as a self-regulatory body to replace PEMRA. The PFUJ and APNEC opposed any move to put PEMRA under the control of the Ministry of Information. They also applauded the prime minister's undertaking to lift the ban on trade union and student union activities by abolishing the Industrial Relations Ordinance, IRO-2002. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

**SRI LANKA:** The Lake House Employee's Union (LHEU) is filing a Fundamental Rights petition to prevent political interference and intimidation of journalists working with media outlets belonging to the government-owned Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd (ANCL), or Lake

House, and to promote implementation of the Lake House Provisions Act. The LHEU is a member of the Federation of Media Employees' Trade Union (FMETU), an IFJ affiliate. According to the LHEU, the petition submitted to the Supreme Court on March 27 seeks to protect the public's right to information, demand independence from editorial restrictions caused by political interference, and implement immediately the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd (Special Provisions) Act 1973, known as the Lake House Provisions Act. It was reported that the Act was initially meant to prevent governments using the publicly funded ANCL to serve political interests. The Act stipulates that Lake House's major shareholder, the government-appointed public trustee, cannot give directions on editorial policy or free expression in regard to any Lake House publications. However, the LHEU reports the Act has not been implemented. The IFJ has called on the Supreme Court to investigate fully the claims made in the Fundamental Rights petition and to take appropriate action to ensure that state-owned media in Sri Lanka is freed of political interference. DETAILS: IFJ Asia-Pacific on +612 9333 0919.

#### JOURNALIST DETAINED 24 DAYS WITHOUT CHARGE

Journalist J.S. Tisseinayagam has been held without charge by Sri Lanka's Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) for 24 days, it was claimed. According to the Free Media Movement (FMM) Mr Tisseinayagam, the editor of [www.outreachlk.wordpress.com](http://www.outreachlk.wordpress.com) and a columnist for the *Sunday Times*, was detained by five TID officers who searched his home on March 7 (31/3/08).

Three journalists working for the website, E-Kwality printing press owner B. Jasiharan, who writes for outreach.com, and a relative of Jasiharan were also arrested on March 7 and 8. A Colombo magistrate's court released the three journalists, Kithsiri Wijesingae, Ranga Lasanatha and Udayanan, as well as Mr Jasiharan's relative, Mr Kumara, on March 19. Mr Jasiharan is reportedly still in detention. On March 26, Mr Tisseinayagam filed a fundamental rights petition to the Supreme Court claiming his unwarranted arrest was based on anti-Tamil ethnic discrimination with no legal basis. His wife reports he has been denied access to a lawyer. A Global Day of Action for the protection of journalists in Sri Lanka is to be held on April 10.

**NEPAL:** According to the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), *Gorkhapatra* district correspondent and president of the FNJ Bajhang chapter Deepak Oli was allegedly attacked and threatened by police on March 28 in Chainpur in the far-western Bajhang region. He reported a police inspector beat him as he attempted to cover a confrontation between cadres of the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) regarding election campaigns for the Constituent Assembly. In another attack, a radio station in Janali Bandali, in the far western Accham region, was allegedly besieged on March 30 after Communist Party Nepal-Maoist leader Jhankar Bahadur Rawal threatened to seize the radio station for broadcasting reports he claimed were against his group. Maoist cadres were reported to have surrounded Radio Ramaroshan, the only FM station in the district, and threatened to storm the premises. They fled after police arrived.

## H. ARTICLES IN FOCUS

### PUNISHING HAMAS HAS BACKFIRED

The policy of isolating Hamas and applying sanctions to Gaza has been a predictable failure, former foreign minister Gareth Evans wrote in the *Christian Science Monitor* (27/3/08). Violence to both Gazans and Israelis is rising. Economic conditions are ruinous, generating anger and despair. The credibility of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and other pragmatic forces has been grievously damaged. The peace process is in tatters. Meanwhile, Hamas's hold on the Gaza Strip, purportedly the principal target of the policy, has been strengthened. Since Hamas assumed full control in June 2007 the already-tight sanctions, imposed following the Islamists' January 2006 electoral victory, have been tightened further. Israel – upon which Gazans depend almost entirely for relations with the outside world – even curtailed cross-border passenger and goods traffic ... Feeble protests aside, the international community has at best been a model of passivity. ARTICLE: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0327/p09s02-coop.html>

### **TURKEY'S JUDGES HEAR CASE TO BAN PRESIDENT**

Turkey's highest court agreed to hear a case to ban the President, Prime Minister and the country's ruling party on grounds that they're threatening the constitutionally-mandated secular basis of the state, The Wall Street Journal reported (1/4/08). "... The courts, along with the army and bureaucracy, make up Turkey's secular establishment. The secularists can't abide the success of the Justice and Development Party, which has roots in political Islam and won power in 2002. Secular politicians can't beat Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's party at the polls. The military can't intimidate it with talk of coups. So judges are now manning the barricades against Mr Erdogan's alleged 'anti-secular activities.' The casus belli is the recent relaxation of a 1989 ban on girls wearing headscarves at university."

ARTICLE: [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120700409879078467.html?mod=googlenews\\_wsj](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120700409879078467.html?mod=googlenews_wsj)

### **CALL IT THE ABU GHRAIB MEMO**

A Justice Department memo is the key link in the chain of evidence connecting the monstrous abuse of detainee at the [Abu Ghraib](#) prison and elsewhere straight to the White House, Dan Fromkin reports in the Washington Post (2/4/08). President Bush [described](#) the torture and murder of prisoners by US military personnel as the work of an aberrant few. But this 2003 memo opened the door to precisely the kinds of abuse so horrifically chronicled in the [photographs](#).

ARTICLE: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/blog/2008/04/02/BL2008040202171.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>

### **A UN SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT DOES NOT BEAT ACTION**

At first appearance, Kevin Rudd's plan for a diplomatic campaign to win Australia a seat on the UN Security Council is in keeping with his ambitions for the nation to have middle power status in world affairs, the Sydney Morning Herald says in an editorial (1/4/08). But before getting too carried away with the prospect of sitting on the UN body charged with maintaining international peace and security, it is worth taking a reality check on what this actually means. The UN Security Council has five permanent members - China, France, Russia, Britain and the US, each with veto power over any resolution. The Prime Minister has signalled Australia's desire for one of the 10 non-permanent member seats on the Security Council for 2013-2014. At present the non-permanent members are Belgium, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia, Indonesia, Italy, Libya, Panama, South Africa and Vietnam. With respect, this is not an auspicious list of middle world powers. ITEM: <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23462551-16382,00.html>.

### **INTELLECTUALS CONDEMN FATWA AGAINST WRITERS**

Arab human rights activists have condemned a Saudi religious edict calling for the execution of two writers for apostasy - giving a rare glimpse of tensions over Islam inside the conservative kingdom, Ian Black writes in The London Guardian (3/4/08). The ruling by Sheikh Abdul Rahman al-Barrak was called "intellectual terrorism" by "clerics of darkness" in a statement obtained by Reuters and signed by 100 human rights groups and intellectuals from the region. Last month Barrak issued a fatwa against two Saudi writers he denounced as "infidels". Writing in al-Riyadh newspaper, Yousef Aba Al-Khail and Abdullah bin Bejad had questioned the Sunni Muslim view standard in Saudi Arabia that adherents of other faiths should be considered unbelievers.

Fatwas by radical Muslim clerics led to the assassination in 1992 of the Egyptian writer Farag Foda and to an attempt in 1994 to murder the Egyptian Nobel prize-winner Naguib Mahfouz.

ARTICLE: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/03/saudi-arabia>

## **I. OTHER NEWS**

### **AUSTRALIA LOOKS FOR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPE**

Meeting the President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, on Thursday, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said his central purpose for being in Brussels was to symbolise the importance of establishing a new broad-based relationship with the European Commission and the European Union.

"We in Australia wish to partner with our friends in Europe in so many areas of common endeavour: whether it is in global trade liberalisation, the great challenges of development for the impoverished nations of the world through implementing the millennium development goals, or beyond that, the great global challenge of climate change.

"Today as the president has indicated, we spent a lot of time talking about the Doha Round. Our view in Australia is this and I share the view expressed by the president, that this Doha Round is do-able.

He said there was an urgent need to conclude this round and "to conclude it urgently, as a shot in the arm for the global economy - which as we know has been going through a period of considerable stress through the unfolding crisis in global financial markets.

"Negotiators right around the world and in Australia's case, the Cairns Group, are hard at work. Time is short, urgency is great, and our requirement to achieve an outcome is significant for all those people around the world who depend on the forces of free trade to prevail, rather than be marginalised."

Mr Rudd also said they had spoken at length about our cooperation on climate change and since the Australian Government's decision to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, "we have been in close consultation with our friends in Europe and also partners around the world on the Bali Road Map. And time again, is ticking away.

"... When I was recently in the Solomon Islands, I opened an aid project concerning health services to people suffering from various categories of diseases in the Solomons. And that was co-funded between the commission and ourselves as the Australian Government. And I would thank those in Brussels who were responsible for that project.

"But it indicates where we can go to further, in the future in harmonising more effectively, our significant development assistance efforts with the Pacific Island countries."

### **MUGABE WILL LEAVE DISASTROUS LEGACY**

By far the most impressive building in central Harare is the headquarters of the organisation most responsible for eviscerating Zimbabwe's economy. Inside its spotless tower of plate glass, the Reserve Bank's sole function is to cause hyperinflation by printing the money that keeps Robert Mugabe's bankrupt regime afloat, the Sydney Morning Herald reported (3/4/08).

"What must be done to revive Zimbabwe? First, bear in mind the monumental scale of the task. In the past eight years, the economy has endured the devastation normally inflicted only by war or natural disaster. Today, the country's gross national product is about 40 per cent smaller than it was in 2000. To place this in context, America during the Depression lost 30 per cent of its GNP. Moreover, Mugabe has inflicted a depression on a country that was pretty poor to begin with. If they are to reduce poverty, African states must achieve annual GNP growth of at least 7 per cent and sustain it for decades. Zimbabwe has been going in reverse for most of the past 10 years," it says. "Grasping why this happened is crucial to identifying the steps needed for recovery."

REPORT: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/04/02/1206851012024.html>

### **KENYANS PROTEST OVER TOO MANY MINISTERS**

Kenyan police fired tear gas at dozens of protesters, including Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai, during a demonstration in the capital, Nairobi, the BBC reported (1/4/08). The rally was held against plans by President Mwai Kibaki to boost the number of ministers in the new cabinet.

President Kibaki wants to increase the cabinet positions to 44, but opposition leader Raila Odinga insists the number should remain at 34 or less. The rivals agreed to share power in February after the disputed elections.

"Considering that we are a poor country, even 15 ministers are enough but they want to increase the number since they do not intend to serve but acquire wealth," Ms Maathai told reporters. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for campaigns to promote conservation, women's rights and transparent government. REPORT: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7325227.stm>

### **RECOGNITION FOR AUSTRALIAN AND US SECURITIES REGULATORY REGIMES**

Australia lies in the same time zone as the East Asian hemisphere and Australia has strong institutional, and, increasingly, linguistic, linkages to financial markets across our region given the increasing number of Australian professionals capable of operating in the principal languages of Asia, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd told a meeting of the American Australian Association in New York (30/3/08).

The market capitalisation of the Australian Stock Exchange at more than one trillion US dollars was about three times bigger than Singapore and around half that of the Hang Seng, he said.

He added that, following a meeting with the chairman of the US Securities and Exchanges Commission, "We announced our intention to produce an agreement by year's end for mutual recognition between Australian and US securities regulatory regimes to enhance capital flows between the two economies – a global first for both the SEC and its Australian equivalent ASIC." SPEECHES: for this and other PM speeches on current tour:

[http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech\\_0153.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0153.cfm).

### **'OFFENSIVELY ANTI-ISLAMIC' VIDEO CONDEMNED: BAN APPEALS FOR CALM**

Secretary-General today led a chorus of United Nations condemnation of the Internet broadcast of a video made by the Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, describing it as "offensively anti-Islamic," while he also called on those upset by the film to remain calm (28/3/08).

In a [statement](#) issued by his spokesperson after screening of the film, entitled *Fitna*, Mr Ban said "there is no justification for hate speech or incitement to violence. The right of free expression is not at stake here.

"I acknowledge the efforts of the Dutch Government to stop the broadcast of this film and appeal for calm to those understandably offended by it. Freedom must always be accompanied by social responsibility."

The Secretary-General stressed that the UN stands at the centre of global efforts to advance mutual respect, understanding and dialogue between different cultures, religions and groups.

"We must also recognise that the real fault line is not between Muslim and Western societies, as some would have us believe, but between small minorities of extremists, on different sides, with a vested interest in stirring hostility and conflict."

In 2005 Spain and Turkey established the [Alliance of Civilizations](#) under the auspices of the UN to promote better cross-cultural relations around the world, and last year Mr Ban appointed the former Portuguese president Jorge Sampaio as the High Representative for the Alliance.

In addition, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour said she joined in the condemnation of the tone and content of the video and urged all those who feel offended by its message "to restrict themselves to denouncing its hateful content by peaceful means.

"There is a protective legal framework, and the resolution of the controversy that this film will generate should take place within it," she said. Three UN Special Rapporteurs also issued a [joint statement](#) condemning what they said was the film's distorted vision and irresponsibility and calling for dialogue and vigilance in response.

### **INDONESIANS PROTEST OVER DUTCH FILM**

Demonstrators hurled eggs and plastic water bottles at the Dutch Embassy in Jakarta over a Dutch MP's film, the BBC reported (31/3/08). Geert Wilders, leader of the right-wing Freedom

Party (PVV) in the Netherlands, released the 17-minute film *Fitna* ("Strife") on the internet last week. The film shows graphic images of terrorist attacks, including the destruction of the World Trade Centre in September 2001 and the London and Madrid train bombings, interspersed with verses from the Koran.

### **DEMOCRATS WELCOME ELECTORAL REFORMS**

The Australian Democrats have warmly welcomed the announcement by the Federal Government that it will fix loopholes in donation disclosure and public funding (28/3/08).

"Minister John Faulkner should be congratulated at being able to overcome the immense political institutional hurdles that often impede significant reform of electoral donations," said Senator Andrew Murray, electoral matters spokesperson.

"There are two vital announcements: reform to start by the next 2008-09 financial year, which means passage of the legislation is needed by the end of June 2008; and bringing the States and Territories into the process so that longer term reform is harmonised and co-ordinated across all States and Territories.

"I am particularly pleased that the Democrats long campaign to ban donations from overseas has finally borne fruit, and our long campaign to end multiple donations being hidden by being paid across state and territory branches of the same party has been successful.

"The great danger in all this is the Coalition - their term in office was characterised by a determination to take Australia backwards on donations, and to make our system much less open and accountable. The Coalition still has a majority in the Senate and could still stymie this important reform.

"The question is will the Coalition finally give up self interest in the national interest, and support these long overdue reforms?" Senator Murray asked.

### **ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE BEGINS WORK**

The Federal Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee has commenced an inquiry into Schedule 1 of the *Tax Laws Amendment (2008 Measures No.1) Bill 2008*, relating to the tax deductibility of political donations.

On 13 February 2008 the *Tax Laws Amendment (2008 Measures No.1) Bill 2008* was introduced in the House of Representatives. The Bill amends the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* and the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1936* to remove tax deductibility for contributions and gifts to political parties, members and candidates.

These amendments would deny individual taxpayers a tax deduction in respect of political party membership fees paid after 1 July 2008, and would also deny a tax deduction on or after 1 July 2008, to both individual and corporate taxpayers in respect of contributions or gifts made to:

- Political parties

- Members of parliament (both State, Territory and Federal)

- Members of a local governing body (such as a local council), and

- Candidates (both party nominated and independent) for political office

The abolition of political gifts/contributions tax deductibility would save the federal government an estimated \$31.4 million between 2009–2010 and 2011–2012.

TERMS OF REFERENCE: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em/taxlawbill/index.htm> .

SUBMISSIONS in writing: April 18 2008.

DETAILS: On 02 6277 2374 or [jscem@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscem@aph.gov.au).

## **CLA ASKS ELECTORAL COMMITTEE TO REFORM 'MANIFEST INEQUALITY'**

CLA has asked the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters to correct the glaring anomaly that has 60,000 electors send an Member of the House of Representatives to the Australian Parliament from the Northern Territory, but double that number - 120,000 - is required to elect an MHR from the Australian Capital Territory. The average number of electors per electorate throughout Australia is about 85,000.

"This is a manifest inequality of voting rights between Australian citizens, which has been actively engineered by the Australian Parliament," CLA CEO Bill Rowlings said. "It demands immediate fixing."

DETAILS: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em/membership.htm>

## **CASTRO OPENS NEW ERA BY LIFTING MOBILE PHONES BAN**

Cubans are to be allowed mobile phones in the latest step by the new President, Raul Castro, to improve access to consumer goods (29/3/08). Cuba has the lowest rate of mobile use in Latin America; the service had been restricted to foreigners, government officials and employees.

REPORT: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/castro-opens-new-era-by-lifting-mobile-phones-ban-802360.html>

## **UNity, UN AND UNAA CONTACTS**

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The World Federation of United Nations is a global network of people linked through [United Nations Associations](#) in over 100 UN member states. Website available at <http://www.wfuna.org/who/> ; newsletter at <http://www.wfuna.org/news/newsletter/index.cfm>.

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